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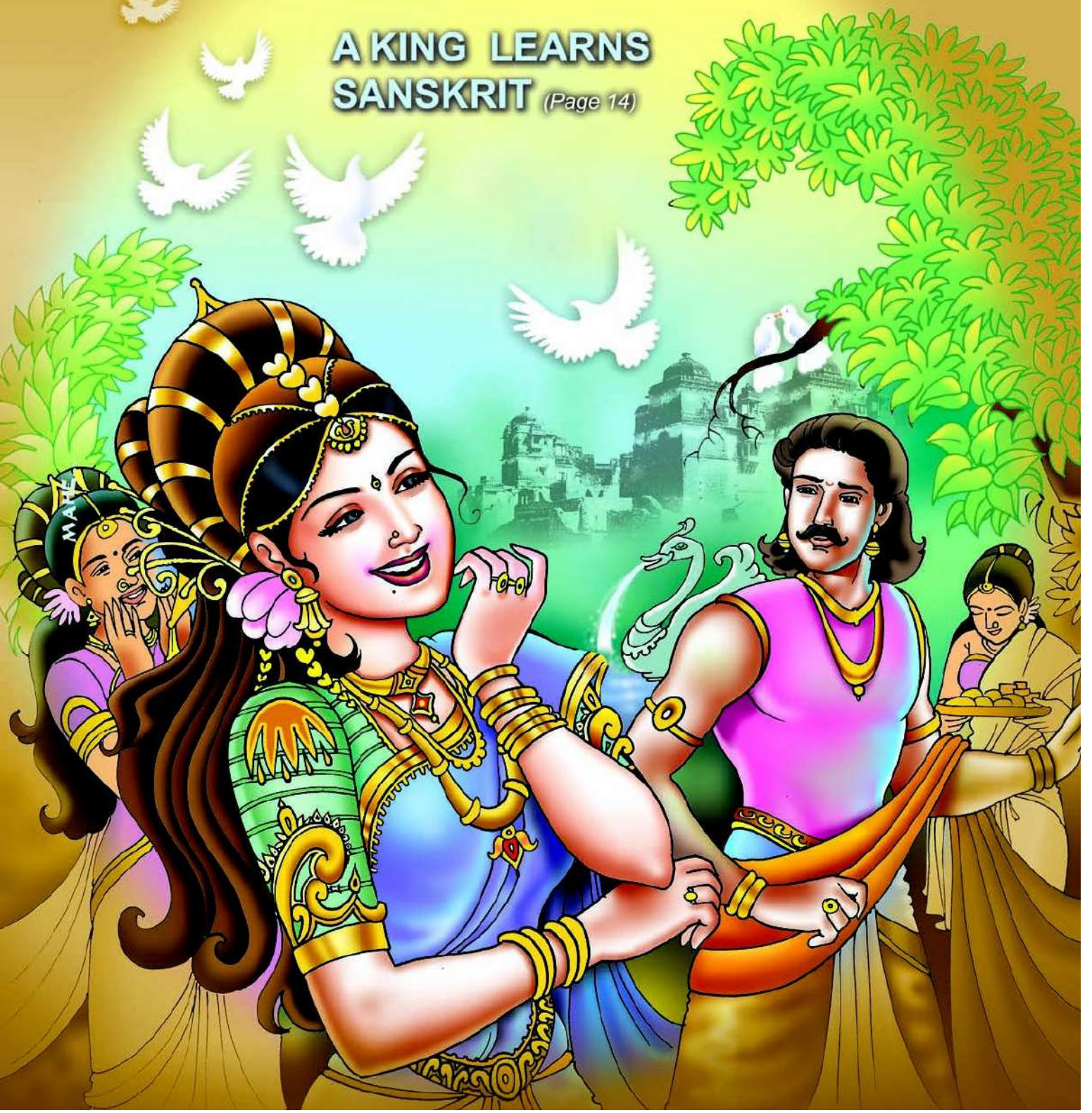
CHANDAMAMA

A KING LEARNS SANSKRIT (Page 14)



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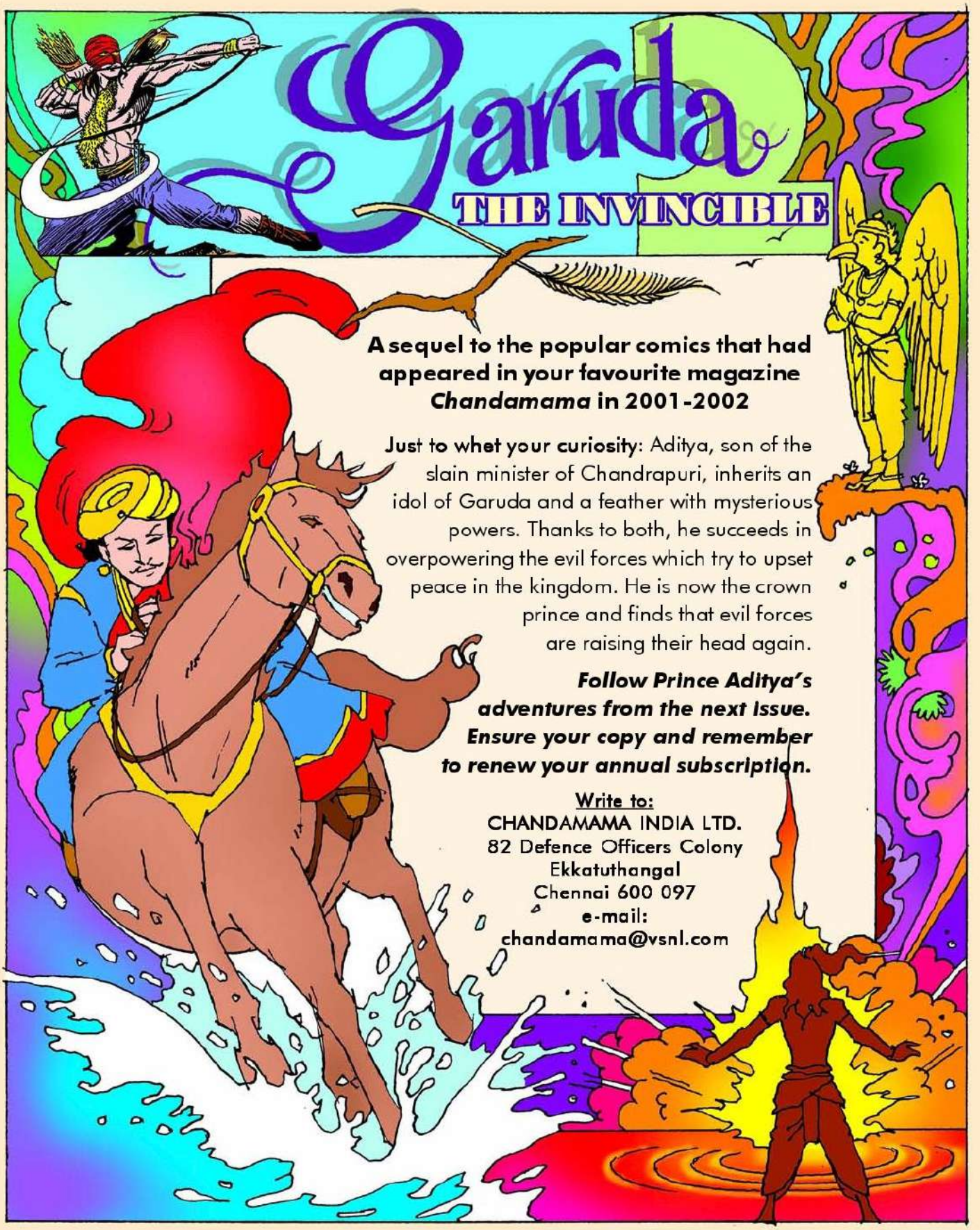
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Founded by B. Nagi Reddi Chakrapani | *Editor* Viswam | *Editorial Advisors* Ruskin Bond, Manoj Das | *Consultant Editor* K.Ramakrishnan

TO FACE THE FUTURE WITH FORTITUDE

To the rest of the world, India has always been known as a peace-loving country, besides being politically neutral. Unfortunately, we have watched our country, in the last one year, struck by external and internal forces, not to speak of natural calamities, much to our shock and dismay.

We had hardly recovered from the disaster called tsunami, when States like Maharashtra and Gujarat had unprecedented floods following a record rainfall brought in by the southwest monsoon. Northeast monsoon seemed to have arrived early and floods were experienced by States in the northeast, W.Bengal, Orissa, Andhra, Karnataka and Tamilnadu, causing widespread damage and loss of lives.

Towards the close of the year, Jammu and Kashmir and our next-door neighbour Pakistan were struck by earthquakes, taking away thousands of lives, marring the festive spirit during the Navratri and Dussehra. When people thought they could at least enjoy Diwali, capital Delhi witnessed dastardly bomb attacks believed to be the handiwork of fanatics.

This is not to forget that natural tragedies and terrorist activities had not been confined to India. But we in India, on taking stock of the happenings over the last one year, are left to wonder whether our country really deserved this punishment. Your magazine had every now and then been reminding the readers how humanity is responsible for creating imbalances in the eco-system provoking nature to react. It is high time we learnt this lesson from Nature. As for the inhuman activities of certain groups against innocent people, we can only blame the decline in human values. If the present generation of adults is beyond redemption, we reiterate that the future lies in the hands of the growing generation. It is left to them to take corrective measures by uplifting the age-old human values, which undoubtedly will have a cascading effect. There is no denying that Man and his attitude has to change.

Chandamama shares the feelings of the grieving millions and expresses the hope that the new year will usher in the much-needed solace and fortitude to face the future.

WISHING ALL OUR READERS A MERRY CHRISTMAS

Justice delayed is justice denied.

-Gladstone

Once the toothpaste is out of the tube, it is awfully hard to get it back in.

-H. R. Haldeman

From pacifist to terrorist, each person condemns violence - and then adds one cherished case in which it may be justified.

-Gloria Steinem

He alone knows life fully who sees it steadily and sees it whole. He who is firm and resolute in will moulds the world to himself.

-Goethe

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MAIL BAG

Reader Sheryl Rosela Fernandes writes from Salcete, Goa:

I started reading *Chandamama* when I was in Standard VIII. I am now in XI. I find your magazine very interesting to read. The stories are really amusing. My favourites are stories by Ruskin Bond and M.D. I also like the Jataka Tales, Kaleidoscope and Laugh till you drop. *Chandamama* helps me to speak better English.

This came from Rakshith R.Ulival, Alike:

We have many subscribers of your magazine in our class. What I like are Arya, and Jokes sent by children like me. I, too, shall send you some jokes. In the November issue, I liked the prizewinning paintings. When I saw them, I was really inspired. I shall participate in your competition next year.

Tusher Dey writes from Murshidabad:

Chandamama is my favourite magazine. It provides me with a vast treasure-house of knowledge, every month. The magazine has helped me to learn moral values. I do not want to miss my copy of *Chandamama*.

Reader Adithya P.Acharya, writes from Udupi:

Nowadays, your magazine is becoming better and better. I have marked the dates 29 in my calendar; that's the day I get my copy by post. Sadly, your November issue came much late. Please introduce Quiz contests in which we can participate. And, please, please announce the names of winners in the Read and React contest.

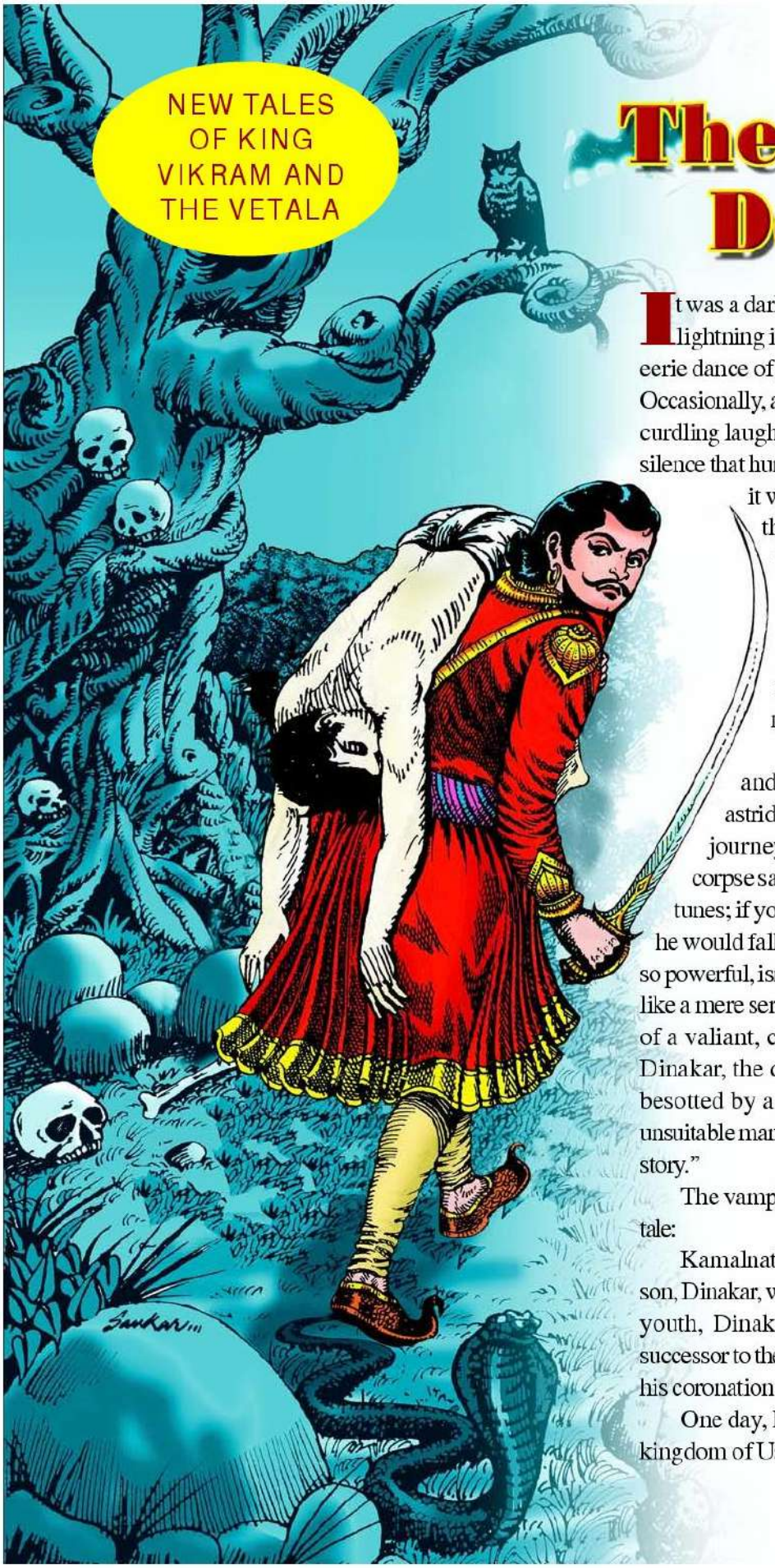
We also regret that the November issue was delayed. The incessant rains of October played havoc with our schedule. This issue carries the winning Read and React entries till September. Those of the following three months will appear in the January 2006 issue. -Editor

This came from Ch.Sripriya of Visakhapatnam:

I am 14 years old; I am a regular reader of *Chandamama*. It gives me opportunities to know more about science, in which I am very much interested. I like G-man comics, Kaleidoscope and all the stories.

Reader Siri of Peddachelmeda (A.P.) writes:

The poems in *Chandamama* October issue were very interesting. I appreciate the children's way of thinking. I hope to see more such poems. Literature lovers will certainly enjoy them.



The Prince's Decision

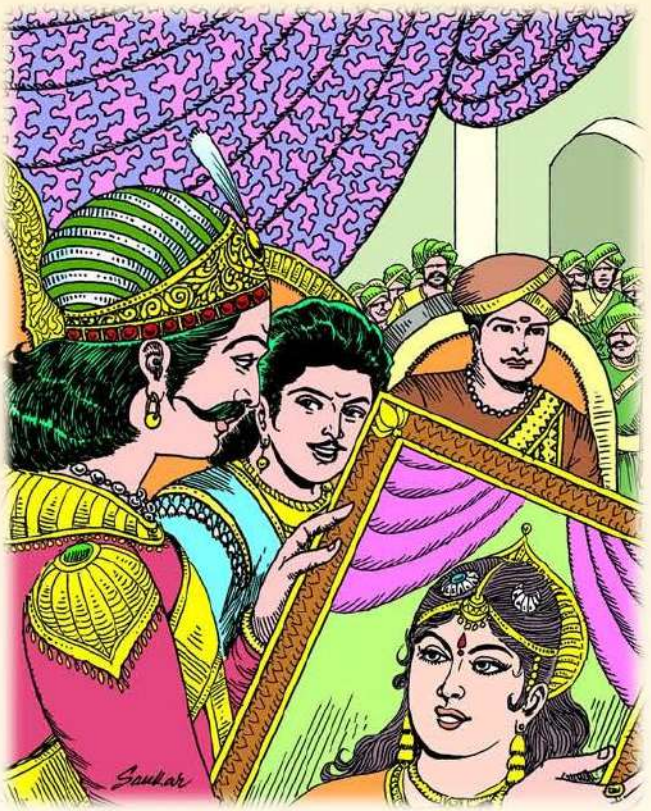
It was a dark, moonless night. Occasional flashes of lightning illuminated the sombre scene, causing an eerie dance of jerky shadows in the cremation ground. Occasionally, a jackal's spine-chilling howl or the blood-curdling laughter of some unseen evil spirit cut into the silence that hung, shroud-like, over the area. Altogether, it was a scene that would strike terror into the bravest heart. But nothing could daunt the intrepid King Vikram. Once again, he made his way to the gnarled tree from which the corpse hung. Bones crunched under his feet and a screeching ghost rose from the dust in shuddering frenzy as he marched ahead.

Oblivious to all this, he reached the tree and brought down the corpse. Slinging it astride his shoulder, he had just begun his return journey when the vampire that possessed the corpse said, "O King! Your subjects dance to your tunes; if you so much as frown at someone in anger, he would fall at your feet and beg your pardon. Being so powerful, isn't it humiliating for you to carry me about like a mere servant? Your conduct is most unbecoming of a valiant, conquering monarch! I'm reminded of Dinakar, the crown-prince of Suryapur, who was so besotted by a girl's beauty that he acted in a similar unsuitable manner, jeopardising his own life. Listen to his story."

The vampire then went on to narrate the following tale:

Kamalnath was the King of Suryapur and his only son, Dinakar, was the crown-prince. An intelligent, sober youth, Dinakar was generally considered an ideal successor to the king. His father, too, was keen to conduct his coronation at the earliest.

One day, Ranjit, an envoy from the neighbouring kingdom of Ushapur arrived in the court. He bowed to



the king and said, "Your majesty, I bring a marriage proposal for Prince Dinakar. Our king would like to give his daughter, Princess Madhulika, in marriage to the prince. Please take a look at her portrait, which I have here."

A glance at the portrait left the king spellbound – he had never seen such a beautiful girl before! He passed the portrait to his son, and smiled to observe that he too was equally entranced by the princess's loveliness.

The princess's horoscope was sent to the royal astrologer. But much to the king's chagrin, the astrologer, after examining it, said, "Pardon me, Sire, but this match is most unsuitable. If our prince marries Princess Madhulika, he's destined to die of snakebite within a month of the wedding!"

On hearing this, the prince turned pale for a moment. But he composed himself and said, "Death is unavoidable; it can happen anywhere, at any time. To throw away the chance of marrying such a damsel, merely because her horoscope foretells death, is hardly wisdom!"

Although unwilling to proceed with the proposal, the king was also loathe to disappoint his son. Thus, the matter reached a stalemate. Finally, the envoy took his leave after informing the king that he would return after a few days to know his decision.

A week went by. One morning, Prince Dinakar rode out into a nearby forest for hunting. By noon, the prince was exhausted by the strenuous hunt. After a picnic lunch on the banks of a lake, he betook himself to the shade of a large banyan tree, where he soon dozed off.

All of a sudden, a large python dropped from a branch on the sleeping prince's body. Before he could react, he was a prisoner in its tight coils. His bodyguards, who were far away, could only watch in stupefaction. They were at a loss to know how to rescue their master. If they attacked the python with their swords or arrows, there was every chance of their missiles striking the prince instead.

Suddenly, as if from nowhere, a fusillade of arrows came flying towards the python with deadly accuracy, cutting it down while leaving the prince unscathed. Filled with relief, the prince looked for his benefactor.

A chariot drew up to a stop before him. A beautiful girl emerged, flanked by her maids. She was holding a bow; evidently, it was she who had saved his life. As the grateful prince walked up to her to express his thanks, he saw, with surprise, that she was none other than Princess Madhulika!

"I'm Madhulika, princess of Ushapur," she explained. "I had come to this forest on a picnic with my friends and maids when I spotted you in danger. I'm glad that I got the opportunity to rescue you. May I know who you are?"

"I'm Dinakar, crown-prince of Suryapur. Thank you for saving my life," said the prince smilingly.

When Madhulika learnt the identity of the man she had rescued, she blushed. They then bade each other farewell and went their separate ways.

When the king heard of this incident, he was very much disturbed, as he saw it as an ominous portent.

A week later, Prince Dinakar was taking a walk in the palace garden in the company of the court jester, when he unknowingly stepped on the tail of a snake that lay hidden beneath some dead leaves under a tree. Instantly, the snake bit him. The prince killed it with his sword.

Meanwhile, the prince's bodyguards rushed to the spot, alerted by the jester's screams. They quickly carried the prince to the royal physician, who gave him an antidote for the poison.

The king now became even more worried. He was certain that if he let his son marry Madhulika, the lad would meet his end.

A few days passed uneventfully. Then, one night, a maid brought his usual glass of milk and kept it on the bedside table. As he reached out to take it, he accidentally knocked down the glass. His pet cat, lying near the table, began lapping up the spilt milk. The next moment, it fell dead! The royal physician, who examined the milk, declared that it had been laced with a lethal poison taken from snake venom. The maid was interrogated. She confessed to having been bribed by an enemy power to kill the prince.

Two days later, the envoy from Ushapur called on the king. The king said, "Since the day you brought proposal, the prince has narrowly escaped death by snakebite not once, but thrice. I shudder to think of what might happen if we go ahead with the marriage – of what could happen to the prince once the princess steps over this threshold as his bride! Sorry, young man; kindly don't raise this issue again."

The royal astrologer, who was also in the court, chipped in, "You're absolutely right to reject the proposal, my lord!"

On hearing this, the envoy's face fell. Without much hope, he turned to the prince to confirm if this was also his opinion. For a moment, the prince was silent. Then, much to the consternation of the king and the astrologer, he declared, "If I'm to get married at all, it shall be to Madhulika and no one else!"

Concluding the story at this point, the vampire demanded, "O King, how could an educated and intelligent youth like Dinakar be so besotted by Madhulika's beauty that he could ignore all his elders' warnings, and be ready to risk his life? Was it not sheer madness on his part? Speak out if you know the answer. If you keep mum, your head shall shatter to pieces!"

King Vikram calmly answered, "Far from being mad, Prince Dinakar acted in a rational and wise manner. He had fallen in love with Princess Madhulika after seeing her portrait and after being saved by her. However, he had kept quiet at that stage. When the astrologer blamed the three mishaps on the princess's horoscope, Dinakar thought it absurd. How could the horoscope influence his life even before they were married? He thought the astrologer was just clutching at straws to prove his point and salvage his professional reputation. Moreover, the princess had saved his life once, and he was confident that she would come to his aid, should any crisis arise after marriage. Thus, his decision shows him to be an intelligent and mature man."

On hearing this, the vampire nodded in approval. But the very next moment, he, along with the corpse, moved off the king's shoulder and flew back to the tree. With a little sigh, King Vikram squared his shoulders and retraced his steps towards the tree.

Newsflash

RECORD PLANTING

The inhabitants of two coastal villages in Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu never tire themselves of recounting how the thousands of casuarina trees planted by them in 2002 had saved the villages from the tsunami of December 26 last. The villagers of Naluvedapathi had two years ago planted 80,244 trees in 23 hours. It was a record, which the inhabitants of Naluvedapathi and Pushpavanam broke on Gandhi Jayanti day this year when they planted 254,464 casuarina trees on 47 acres in 24 hours. The planting in which nearly 300 farmers took part, started at 3.40 p.m. on Oct. 1 and concluded at 3.40 p.m. the next day. This world record was watched by three independent observers.

INDIAN FESTIVALS IN U.K.

People in India, especially the Hindus, had reasons to feel elated when they read reports of Deepavali (Diwali) being celebrated in the British House of Commons, and of Hindus in London immersing a Ganesh idol in theThames. The idol made of plaster of paris was brought from Pune and worshipped for three days before it was taken for immersion, in the presence of nearly 10,000 people from all walks of life. The *Shobha Yatra* was led from the Viswa Hindu Mandir to the Ram Mandir in Southall and thence to the river. The Ganesh Chaturthi festival was organised by the Hindu Culture and Heritage Society, UK. Diwali celebrations were held in the large dining hall of the House of Commons, where idols of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana had been placed. There were dance performances, music recitals and a display of Indian food. A large number of Ministers, Members of Parliament, Lords and Baronesses attended the celebrations.

Prime Minister Tony Blair sent this special message : "The festival gives each of us a chance to reflect on the important contribution Indian communities are making for Britain's success."

THE WHISTLE

Ezhilan gave a long whistle. It was a signal to his mother that he was on his way home. He was a 12 year old boy, working in a match factory, only a few yards from their house. His mother had told him one day, "Give me some signal so that I can start warming the food for you and it will be ready as soon as you reach the house and you need not remain hungry." So Ezhilan had resorted to giving a whistle, which his mother alone could recognize.

One day, as usual when she heard his whistle, she started warming the food. But it so happened that there was no sign of her son. After sometime, she heard the whistle and soon afterwards she saw him coming. The next day also she heard the whistle and came out of her house and looked out. But she did not see him. His mother was confused. A little later, he turned up. They could hear the whistle again, even though Ezhilan was very much at home! Now both became curious. The whistle was coming from the backyard. Mother and son went there and they were surprised to find a black bird perched on a tree in the backyard whistling exactly the same way the boy used to do.

His mother said casually, "Oh! This bird was mimicking you!"

But Ezhilan was elated. He shouted, "Mother! Look at the bird! How intelligent she is! She has picked up the whistling sound from me! I find a distinct message in her whistle. Just as my whistle is a signal to you that I'm on my way and to keep my food ready, it is also signaling to you that she has arrived and she wants you to offer

her some food. Mother, please give some food to this gentle creature also. Show the same affection to my feathered friend, as you would show to me!"

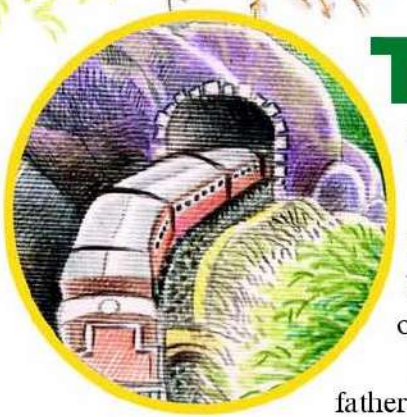
Thereafter the black bird became Ezhilan's pet and both would take food together in the garden every afternoon.

- P. Iniyan (14), Chennai

(Rendered from an entry in Tamil sent for the Children's Special Competition)

From the pen of RUSKIN BOND

DRAGON IN THE TUNNEL



The first time I saw a train, I was standing on a wooded slope outside a tunnel, not far from Kalka. Suddenly, with a shrill whistle and a great burst of steam, a green and black engine came snorting out of the blackness.

I turned and ran to my father. "A dragon!" I shouted. "There's a dragon coming out of its cave!"

Since then, steam engines and dragons have always inspired the same sort of feelings in me–wonder, awe and delight. I would like to see a real dragon one day, green and gold, and as I have always preferred the reluctant sort–rather shy and gentle–and until that day comes, I shall be content with steam engines.

In India, the steam engine is still in use on some lines. India has one of the most extensive railway systems in the world. Hundreds of trains that criss-cross the sub-continent, panting over the desert and plain, through hill and forest, are often pulled by these snorting monsters who belch smoke by day and scatter red stars in the night.

Even now, when I see a train coming round the bend of a hill, or crossing a bridge, or cutting across a wide flat plain, I feel the same sort of innocent wonder that I feel as a boy. Where are all these people going to, and where have they come from? What are they really like? When children wave to me from carriage windows, I wave back at them. It is a habit I have never lost. And sometimes I am in a train, waving, and the village children wave back to me–well, not me exactly, it is really the train they are waving to.

Small wayside stations have always fascinated me. Manned sometimes by just one or two railway employees, and often situated in the middle of a damp subtropical forest, or clinging to the mountainside on the way to Shimla or Darjeeling, these little symbols of the pioneering spirit that led me to lay tracks into the remote corners of the earth.

I remember such a stop on a line that went through the Terai forests near the foothills of the Himalayas. At about ten at night, the *Khalasi,* or station watchman, lit his kerosene lamp and started walking up the tracks into the jungle.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"To see if the tunnel is clear," he said. "The Overland Mail comes in twenty minutes."

I accompanied him along the track, through a deep cutting which led to the tunnel. Every night, the *Khalasi* walked through the dark tunnel, and then stood outside to wave his lamp to the oncoming train as a signal that the track was clear. If the engine driver did not see the lamp he stopped the train. It always slowed down near the cutting.

Having inspected the tunnel, we stood outside, waiting for the train. It seemed a long time coming. There was no moon, and the dense forest seemed to be trying to crowd us into the narrow cutting. The sounds of the forest came to us–the belling of a sambhar deer and the cry of a jackal told us that perhaps a tiger or a leopard was on the prowl. There were strange, nocturnal bird sounds, and then silence.

The *Khalasi* stood outside the tunnel, trimming his lamp, listening to the faint sounds of the jungle–sounds which he alone could identify and understand. Something made him stand very still for a few moments, peering into the darkness, and I knew that everything was not as it should be.

"There is something in the tunnel," he said.

I could hear nothing at first, but then there came a regular sawing sound, just like the sound made by someone sawing through the branch of a tree.

"Baghera!" whispered the *khalasi*. He had said enough to enable me to recognise the sound–the sawing of a leopard trying to find its mate. "The train will be coming soon. We must drive the animal out, or it will be run over!"

He must have sensed my surprise, because he said, "Don't be afraid. I know this leopard well. We have seen each other many times. He has a weakness for stray dogs and goats, but he will not harm us." He gave me his small handaxe to hold and, raising his lamp high, started walking into the tunnel, shouting at the top of his voice to try and scare away the animal. I followed close behind him.

We had gone about twenty yards into the tunnel when the light from the lamp fell on the leopard. He was crouching between the tracks, only about twenty feet away from us. He bared his teeth in a snarl and went down on his belly, tail twitching. I thought he was going to spring. The *khalasi* and I shouted together. Our voices rang and echoed through the tunnel. And the leopard, uncertain as to how many humans were in there with him, turned swiftly and disappeared in the darkness.

The *khalasi* and I walked until the end of the tunnel without seeing the leopard again. As we returned to the entrance of the tunnel, the rails began to hum and we knew the train was coming.

I put my hand to one of the rails and felt its tremor. And then the engine came round the bend, hissing at us, scattering sparks into the darkness, defying the jungle as it roared through the steep sides of the cutting. It charged straight at the tunnel and into it, thundering past us like the beautiful dragon of my dreams.

And when it had gone, the silence returned and the forest breathed again. Only the rails still trembled with the passing of the train.

A PAGE FROM INDIAN HISTORY:

A KING

Long, long ago, way back in the 1st century A.D., there reigned a king named Shatavahana. His kingdom on the bank of the Godavari was known as Pratisthana and the ruler was called "Dakshinapatheswar", which meant 'ruler of the south'. His kingdom mainly covered the region we now know as Andhra Pradesh. There are many popular legends about the founder of this dynasty, King Shatavahana, who is also referred to as Shalivahana.

It is said that although Shatavahana was a much-loved and valiant king, he did not have the chance to receive proper education while he was a boy because he was always on horseback fighting battles. In those days, education meant a knowledge of Sanskrit, the language of the scriptures, and anyone who did not know it was considered not properly educated. But kings had in their courts brilliant scholars who could always explain things. In Shatavahana's court there were two famous scholars named Gunadhya and Sarvavarma. It was customary for educated people to converse in Sanskrit. But the uneducated folk spoke Prakrit.

Since Shatavahana did not know Sanskrit, all the court work was done in Prakrit. He felt ashamed of himself for not being able to speak Sanskrit or read the wonderful classics written in that language. Finally, there came a time when he felt that he just had to learn it. He sent for the scholars and told them of his great wish. "Do you think I can possibly learn Sanskrit?" he asked them eagerly. "I want to read things for myself and understand them first hand, and not have them explained to me."

"Of course it is possible, Sire," they said, "but Sanskrit is a difficult language and cannot be picked up overnight or even in a month or two. You have to devote a lot of time for study. If you do, there is no reason why you can't learn it." But time was one thing which a busy king like Shatavahana did not have. Whenever he tried to study quietly, some urgent state matter would come up and he had to attend to it.

There was a beautiful pool in the royal garden used by the queens for swimming. One day, while the spring festival was being celebrated, Shatavahana also went swimming with the queens. It was a very enjoyable occasion for the queens, as Shatavahana being a busy king could seldom find time to relax with them. They crossed and re-crossed the pool several times and splashed water at one another playfully as they laughed and joked. One of the queens happened to be a scholar and could speak Sanskrit fluently. When the king splashed water at her, she asked

LEARNS SANSKRIT

him not to do it any more as she was tired. She spoke in Sanskrit and the king, unable to understand what she was saying, thought she was asking for sweets. He sent the waiting maids to fetch sweets for the queens. When the maid returned, Shatavahana aimed the sweets towards the queen and asked her to have her fill while the other queens looked on.

The queen was very intelligent and realized that the king had not understood her words. She burst out laughing. "Really, my lord I fail to see how you could mistake my words. They were perfectly simple. I merely said, don't splash water any more. I did not ask for sweets! Don't you understand even simple Sanskrit? And you are the king of the land!"

The other queens joined in the laughter. King Shatavahana hung his head down in shame. His eyes filled with tears as he got back to the palace and shut himself in his chambers.

How humiliating for a king to have his own queens laugh at his ignorance! He felt that he would rather die than bear the humiliation of facing them again.

From that afternoon Shatavahana stayed in his apartments and refused to come out or meet anyone. The court remained empty and the kingdom faced one problem after another. There was no one to solve them, no one to run the administration. Things came to a virtual standstill and there was chaos everywhere. The king's ministers were worried. More so because he refused to see anyone.

No one could guess what was wrong. No one seemed to know. "He can't be ill or he would have sent for the royal physicians," said one of the ministers. "It can't be an outside enemy because our kingdom is well protected and no one can come from outside," said another. "It can't be an internal problem either because our people are very loyal and would die for the king," remarked a third. "Gunadhya! Sarvavarma! You two are very close to the king," said the chief minister. "Tell us what you think."

Both Gunadhya and Sarvavarma were lost in thought. Finally, Gunadhya said, "I think the king is worried about his lack of education. Perhaps something has come up afresh to make him so upset."

"In that case, you had better try to see him and find out what is wrong," said the chief minister. "I know he is consistently refusing to see us, but he might just agree to see you two. He holds you both in great respect."

Gunadhya and Sarvavarma went to the palace the next morning and sought an audience. This time no one stopped them from going inside although the king refused

to greet them or speak to them. After sitting silently for a few moments Sarvavarma said, "Sire, I came to tell you about a strange dream that I had last night. I dreamt of goddess Sarasawati and how a lotus fell from her feet and came rolling down until it rested on your head. It must mean something. Do you remember telling us long ago that you wished to learn Sanskrit so that you might study the scriptures yourself? I think the time has come. If you start now you are sure to succeed."

Hope dawned in the eyes of the king and he looked at them eagerly. "How long will it take me?" he asked.

"You know how elaborate Sanskrit grammar is," said Gunadhya, "and you cannot speak or understand the language without a thorough knowledge of its grammar. It normally takes 12 years to learn it, but I think I could teach you in just six years."

"Six years!" cried Shatavahana. "Even that is a very long time for a king with duties and responsibilities. I don't see how I can spare the time."

"I shall teach you in just six months," said Sarvavarma.

"That's quite impossible," cried Gunadhya, "you don't know what you are saying."

"I shall make it possible," said Sarva Varma quietly.

"I accept your offer," said the king happily. Gunadhya hung down his head and walked out quietly.

Sarvavarma was greatly worried when he went home, for he too knew that the task was near impossible. He had said it simply for the sake of defying Gunadhya, his rival. His wife told him, "It was foolish of you to have taken on such a challenge. You know very well that the feat is beyond any man."

"What shall I do? Please tell me. Shall I run away? Go and tell the king that I was merely bragging?" cried Sarvavarma.

"No, you've to do it somehow. Pray to Lord Kartikeya to come to your rescue. He alone can save you from dishonour," suggested his wife. So Sarvavarma prayed with all his heart and the Lord blessed him and helped him compose a unique book of grammar called "Ka-tantra". King Shatavahana studied Ka-tantra from Sarvavarma and became a scholar in Sanskrit in just six months.

After that he appeared in the royal court once again and sat on the throne. A scholar had come to see him from a distant land. He read out a sloka addressed to the king. The king smiled and composed a sloka in reply. It was so beautifully composed that everyone cheered. At last King Shatavahana felt content. But he did one more thing before the day was over. He sent for the queen who had insulted him that spring afternoon at the pool and made her his chief queen. He freely admitted that it was because of her that he was a scholar today.

"Please forgive me for having laughed at you," cried the queen, "you can't think how bitterly I have blamed myself all these years."

"Please don't," said the king smiling, "you've made me a happy man at last and a king the subjects need not be ashamed of!"

- *Swapna Dutta*

LAUGH TILL YOU DROP!

I hope life isn't a big joke ... because I don't get it.

- *Unknown*

Father: Everything is going up! The price of food is up; the price of clothing is up; taxes are up. If only there was one thing that was going down!

Son: This ought to make you feel better, Dad. It's my report card.

English Teacher: Which is correct: Three and four IS nine or three and four ARE nine?

Bunty: Neither. Three and four are seven.

Grandma: If you wash your face, I'll give you a piece of chocolate. And if you wash behind your ears, I'll give you two pieces.

Johny: Maybe I'd better have a bath!

Poet: Do you think I should put more fire into my poetry?

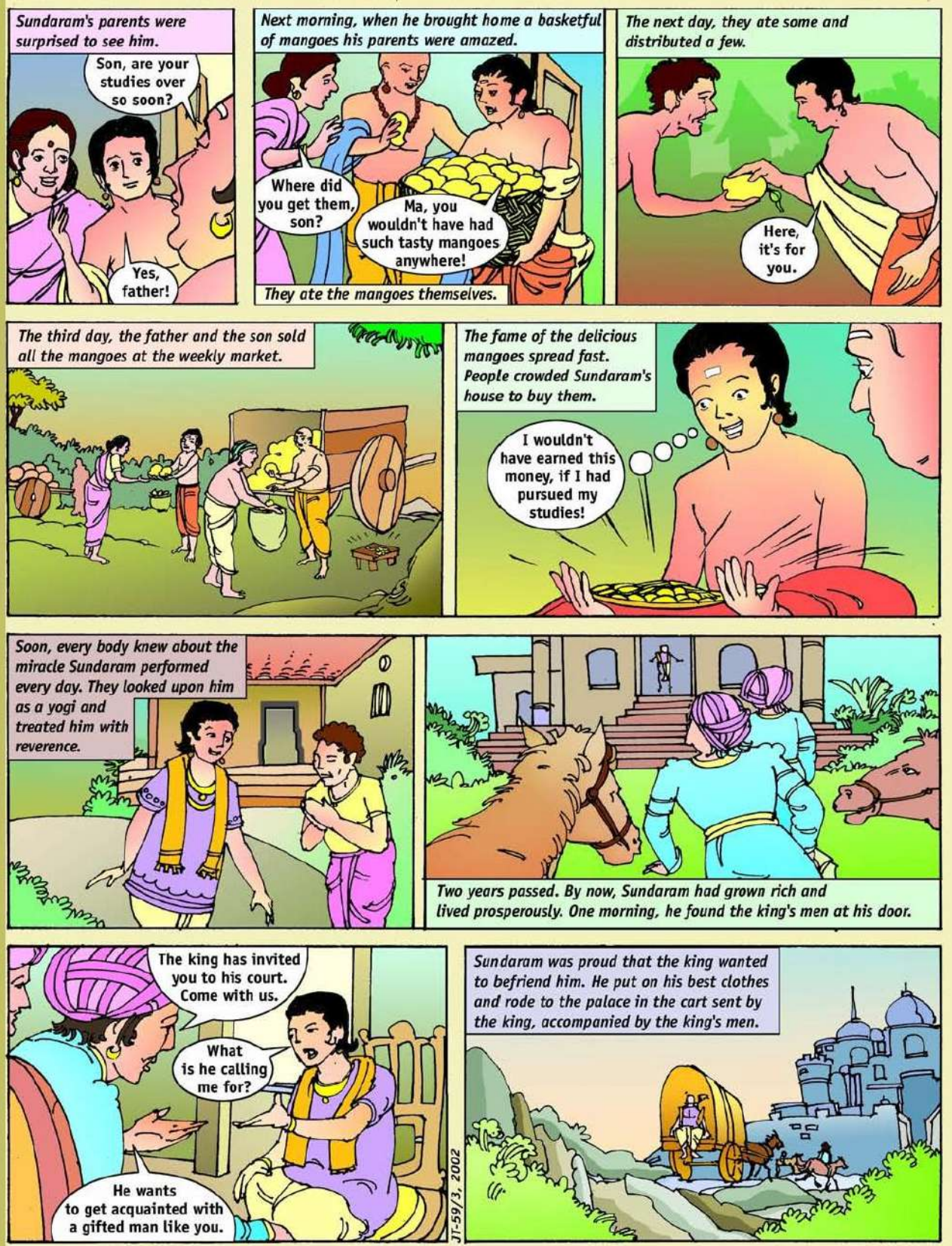
Publisher: No, I think you ought to put more of your poems into the fire.

DUSHTU DATTU

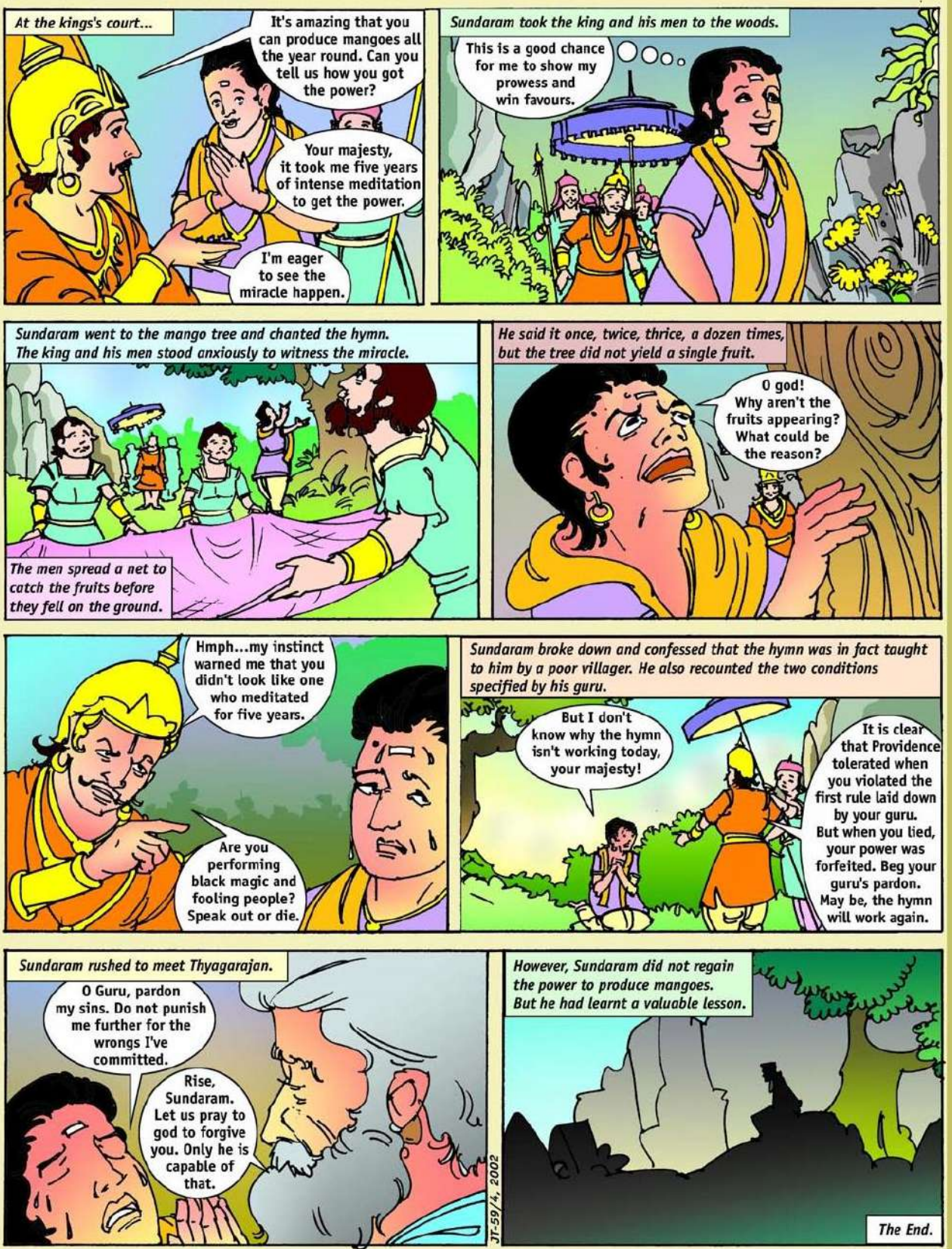
One day, at the dining-table.
Are worms good for health, Daddy?
What?! Haven't I told you not to talk of such things while eating?
But why did you ask, Dattu?
Because I saw one on the burger Daddy just ate!
Uuuu

(CONTINUED FROM THE NOVEMBER ISSUE)

JATAKA TALES


Sundaram's parents were surprised to see him.
Son, are your studies over so soon?
Yes, father!
Next morning, when he brought home a basketful of mangoes his parents were amazed.
Where did you get them, son?
Ma, you wouldn't have had such tasty mangoes anywhere!
They ate the mangoes themselves.
The next day, they ate some and distributed a few.
Here, it's for you.
The third day, the father and the son sold all the mangoes at the weekly market.
The fame of the delicious mangoes spread fast. People crowded Sundaram's house to buy them.
I wouldn't have earned this money, if I had pursued my studies!
Soon, every body knew about the miracle Sundaram performed every day. They looked upon him as a yogi and treated him with reverence.
Two years passed. By now, Sundaram had grown rich and lived prosperously. One morning, he found the king's men at his door.
The king has invited you to his court. Come with us.
What is he calling me for?
He wants to get acquainted with a gifted man like you.
JT-59/3, 2002
Sundaram was proud that the king wanted to befriend him. He put on his best clothes and rode to the palace in the cart sent by the king, accompanied by the king's men.

MANGOES AT COMMAND


At the kings's court...
It's amazing that you can produce mangoes all the year round. Can you tell us how you got the power?
Your majesty, it took me five years of intense meditation to get the power.
I'm eager to see the miracle happen.
Sundaram took the king and his men to the woods.
This is a good chance for me to show my prowess and win favours.
Sundaram went to the mango tree and chanted the hymn. The king and his men stood anxiously to witness the miracle.
The men spread a net to catch the fruits before they fell on the ground.
He said it once, twice, thrice, a dozen times, but the tree did not yield a single fruit.
O god! Why aren't the fruits appearing? What could be the reason?
Hmph...my instinct warned me that you didn't look like one who meditated for five years.
Are you performing black magic and fooling people? Speak out or die.
Sundaram broke down and confessed that the hymn was in fact taught to him by a poor villager. He also recounted the two conditions specified by his guru.
But I don't know why the hymn isn't working today, your majesty!
It is clear that Providence tolerated when you violated the first rule laid down by your guru. But when you lied, your power was forfeited. Beg your guru's pardon. May be, the hymn will work again.
Sundaram rushed to meet Thyagarajan.
O Guru, pardon my sins. Do not punish me further for the wrongs I've committed.
Rise, Sundaram. Let us pray to god to forgive you. Only he is capable of that.
JT-59/4, 2002
However, Sundaram did not regain the power to produce mangoes. But he had learnt a valuable lesson.
The End.

SCIENCE FAIR

- By Rosscote Krishna Pillai

DECEMBER BORN – LOUIS PASTEUR

The greatest name in man's victorious fight against diseases, Louis Pasteur, was born on December 27, 1822 in the French town of Dole. He was the only son of Jean-Joseph Pasteur, a poor tanner. Before Louis was three years old, the family moved to the town of Arbois. As a child, his interest lay in painting and he wanted to be an artist; but inspired by his parents, he became devoted to his studies in school and college and graduated from the Royal College in Besancon. Then, in 1843, his success in an entrance exmination enabled him to join the famous Ecole Normal Superieure in Paris. After four years he passed from there with distinction in physics and chemistry.

He developed keen interest in chemical research and diligently pursued it. When he was only 26, he made an exciting discovery: about crystal structure. He found two different— asymmetric – forms of tartaric crystals — mirror images of each other; he could separate them and show that both rotated polarized light in equal but opposite directions. Pasteur thus became the father of a new science, *stereochemistry*.

In 1854, he was made Professor of Chemistry in the new University of Lille. It was here that he did his first major work on fermentation, which became the origin of *microbiology*. Lille, a centre of wine- and beer-making, was facing the problem of the liquids getting sour and putrified during fermentation. Pasteur showed that it was microbes that caused them to be spoilt, and by moderately heating them for a few minutes, the microbes would be eliminated. By *pasteurisation* (now used all over the world in the case of milk), Pasteur saved the industry from collapse.

The silk industry in France was being crippled by a similar crisis, when millions of silk worms perished by an unknown disease. Pasteur found that the worms had two killer diseases, both caused by microbes. His immunization method to eliminate them helped the industry to survive utter ruin. He now turned his attention to medicine. Exhorted by him, surgeons started disinfecting their instruments by boiling and steaming before performing an operation.

His great discovery, which saved millions of human lives and won for him world-wide gratitude, was his cure for rabies caused by a mad dog's bite. Despite grave danger, he sucked a mad dog's saliva into a tube and made a vaccine of weakened rabies' germs out of it. He now faced a dilemma : how to try it on humans. It was then that a boy named Joseph Meister, bitten by a dog in 14 places, was brought to him(see box on facing page). Pasteur Institutes, on the model of the Institute in Paris established as per his wish, have been set up in many countries, including one at Coonoor in India. Pasteur died (at the height of his glory) on September 28, 1895 at Saint-Cloud near Paris. Craters on Mars and the moon have been named after him.

CATALYSIS FOR FRIENDLY DRUGS

GRUBBS SCHROCK CHAUVIN

This year's Nobel Prize-winning work in chemistry has achieved a breakthrough, providing potential for producing new drugs and pharmaceuticals, food-stuff, fuels and other new organic substances, which will be both human and environment-friendly. The Prize is to be shared by Yves Chauvin of France, and Prof. Richard R. Schrock, and Prof. Robert H. Grubbs, of the U.S.A. The basis of all organic substances including living tissues, pharmaceuticals and plastics, is carbon, the most versatile element in the world. Carbon atoms combine with other elements, such as hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, chlorine and sulphur besides metals to form molecules of an enormous number of organic compounds which exist with strong single, double or triple bonds as chains or branched structures or rings. Using metal compounds of carbon as catalysts in a chemical reaction, called "metathesis" (meaning changing places), the double bonds in molecules of organic chemicals are broken to form new double-bonded molecules of entirely different organic substances.

Mr Chauvin could explain, how exactly metal catalysts function by such bond-breaking and bond-making mechanism, in the synthesis of new molecules. In 1990, Prof. Shrock discovered a compound containing the metal, *molybdenum*, as a very effective catalyst for use in metathesis. Two years later, Prof. Grubbs found that a compound with the metal, *ruthenium*, was a more stable and selective catalyst even in the presence of alcohols, water and carboxyl acids.

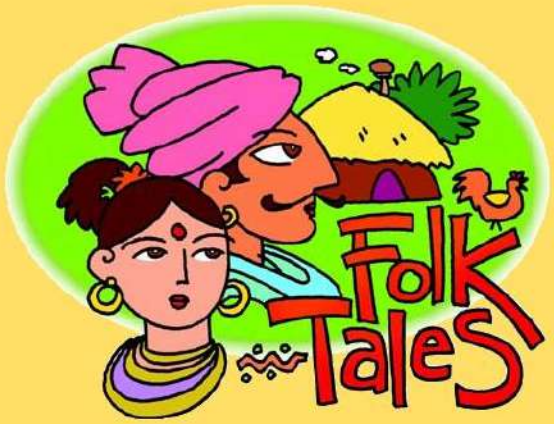
A DEBT REPAID

When Joseph Meister, bitten by a mad dog, was brought to Pasteur, his mother was bitterly weeping, begging him to save her boy. Pasteur inoculated the vaccine made by him. That was the first-ever injection of the vaccine into a human body. In the next two weeks the boy could go home. Years later, Pasteur made Joseph the gate-keeper of the Pasteur Institute in Paris. After the great man's death, his mortal remains were placed in an ornate crypt in the chapel of the Institute. In 1940, when the Nazis invaded France and the army men ordered Joseph to open the crypt for inspection, the gate-keeper, ever grateful to Pasteur for saving his life, refused to open and allow them to defile the sepulchre; instead he killed himself.

SCIENCE QUIZ

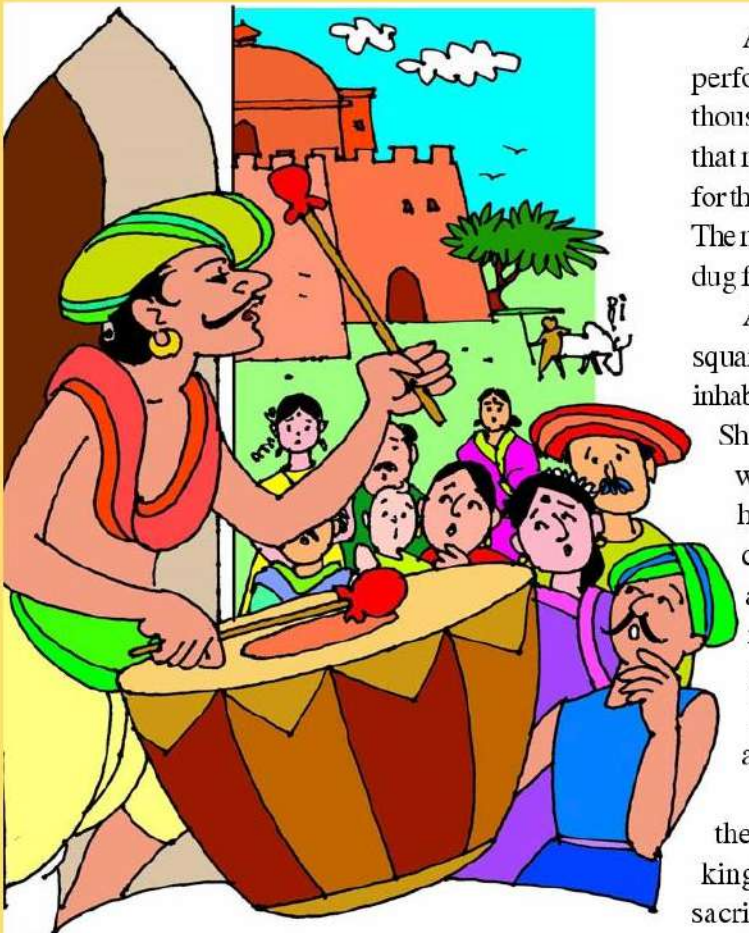
1. Which bird was seen first in 1507 in Mauritius, but became extinct in 1681?
   a. Arctic tern; b. Dove c. Archaepteryx; d. Dodo.
2. To escape the pull of the Earth's gravity, at what speed should a spacecraft go?
   a. 31,680 km/hour; b. 40,320 km/hour; c. 54,000 km/hour; 43,200 km/hour.
3. Which living bird has the largest wingspan?
   a. Albatross; b. Eagle; c. Ostrich; d. Emu.
4. Express the astronomical distance of *light year* in kilometres.
   a. 20.11 trillion km; b. 14.46 million km; c. 9.46 trillion km; d. 14.83 billion km.

Answer: 1) d. Dodo, 2) b. 40,320 km/hour, 3) a. Albatross, 4) c. 9.46 trillion km.



A FOLKTALE FROM MAHARASHTRA

MIRACLE AT THE TANK



Long, long ago, there lived a king named Vijayaditya who was a great devotee of Lord Siva. He had built a beautiful Siva temple in marble, and was forever thinking of new ways to propitiate the Lord.

One day, the king thought, 'The auspicious month of *Shravan* has begun. Worshipping the Lord on Mondays in Shravan is said to confer much benefit, as this particular day is sacred to Siva. So, there must be some special worship on this occasion. What should it be?'

After much thought, he hit upon an idea. Why not perform an abhisheka (ritual bath) of the idol with a thousand and eight pots of milk, every Monday during that month? He would get all the people to donate milk for this worship, so that they could also enjoy its benefits. The milk to be used would be collected in a tank, specially dug for the purpose.

A few days later, the king's herald stood in the town square and announced to the beat of drums: "Hear ye, inhabitants of the town! Tomorrow is the first Monday of Shravan, and our gracious king will worship Lord Siva with a thousand and eight pots of milk. Every householder must visit the temple tomorrow morning, carrying all the milk he or she has in his household, and pour it into the temple tank. Remember, you must pour in all the milk you have, so that the tank may quickly be filled to the brim. This will please the Lord, and he will shower his blessings upon us all."

All the people gathered in the town square to hear the announcement. Some were pleased about their king's piety; others, perhaps, were not too happy to sacrifice their milk for the worship. But no one said anything, and they all dispersed.

Early next morning, people started going to the temple with pots of milk. Soon, a serpentine queue had formed in front of the temple, as more and more people arrived to pour their share of milk into the tank. They had brought all the milk they had in their houses, leaving not even a drop for the calves.

Infants, children, and the old and the sick – everyone went without their usual share of milk that day, as all the

milk had been taken away and poured into the temple tank.

As the hours ticked by, the level of milk in the tank slowly began rising. However, by midday the tank was only half full. Considering the number of pots that were being emptied into it every moment, this was certainly surprising!

Gradually, the priests, as well as the people who had gathered in the temple precincts were perturbed. What was happening here? A murmur of agitation ran through the crowd. Someone muttered, "How is it that the tank doesn't get filled up, though nearly every household in town has poured its milk into it? Is Lord Siva giving us a sign of displeasure? Have we committed any sin unknowingly?" The priests were much upset.

Unnoticed by all, an old woman slipped into the temple compound just then. She lived at the other end of the town. She had got up early in the morning and milked her cows, leaving some milk for the calves. Then she fed her family with milk and completed her household chores. After this, only a small bowl of milk remained. She carried this to the temple and poured it into the tank, praying, "O all-merciful Lord! This is all I have to offer you, but I give it with all my devotion. Please accept my humble offering!"

Lo and behold the half-empty tank now overflowed with milk. The old woman went away as unobtrusively as she had come. The king and the priests, who came to check the tank, were overjoyed to find it full, and the special worship was duly conducted.

The same thing happened the next Monday. All the townspeople dutifully poured their milk into the tank; yet, it remained only half-full until the moment the old woman had emptied her little bowl into it, when it overflowed. Everyone was puzzled by this miracle.

The king was determined to get at the bottom of the mystery. So, on the third Monday, he disguised himself as a guard and took up position near the tank early in the morning to see what was happening.

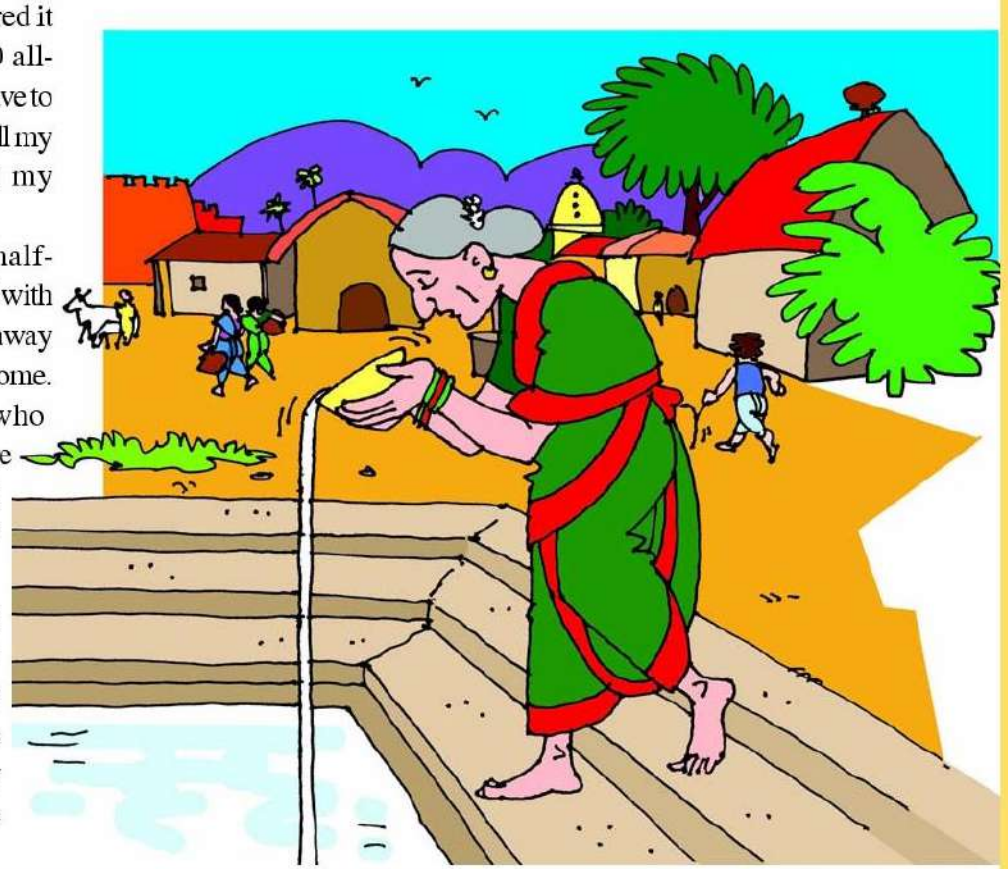
As before, people began lining up before the tank with their offerings. But the level of milk did not rise above the halfway mark.

Then the old woman arrived with her bowl of milk and prayed aloud, "O Lord Siva, I give you the milk I can spare. I'm sure that you, in your infinite compassion, will accept it. Please bless me so that I have strength to stand by my conviction!"

Then she poured the milk into the tank. As she turned to go, the watching king was amazed to see the half-empty tank overflowing!

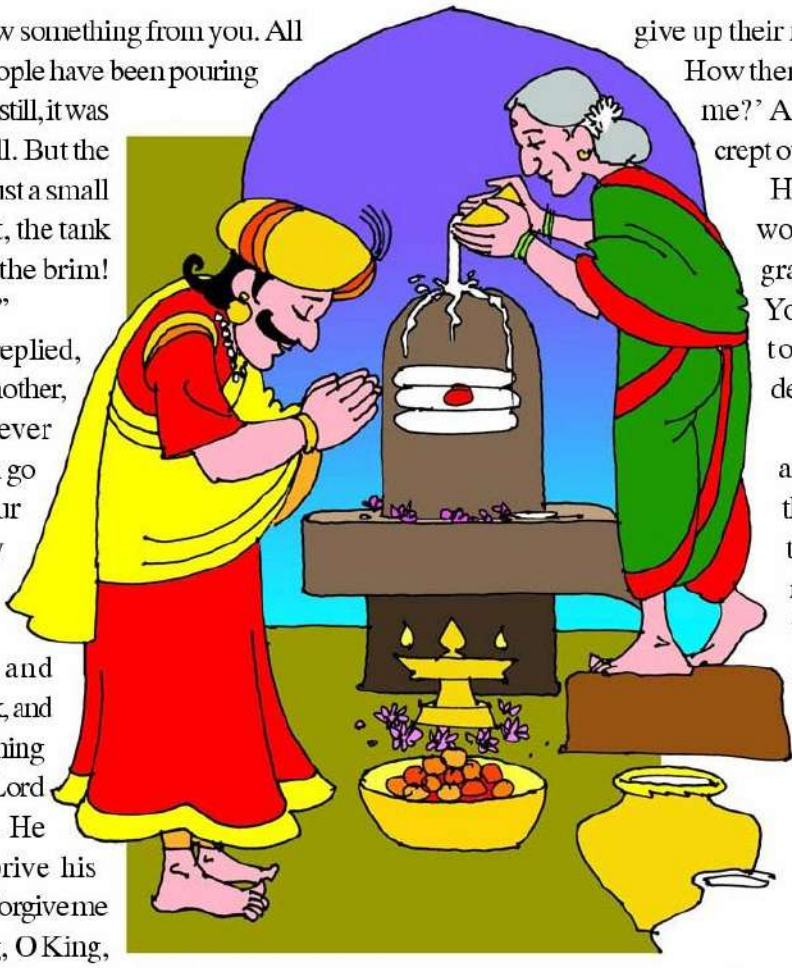
He sprang forward and stopped the old woman. Shivering with fright, she asked, "Why do you stop me? What have I done?"

The king said, "Don't be afraid, Mother. I'm the king,



and would like to know something from you. All this while, so many people have been pouring their milk into this tank; still, it was not more than half-full. But the moment you poured just a small bowlful of milk into it, the tank suddenly filled up to the brim! Can you explain why?"

The old woman replied, "Your majesty, I'm a mother, and a mother can never bear to see her children go hungry. So, I defied your order. While milking my cows, I left some milk for the calves; then I fed my children and grandchildren with milk, and brought only the remaining milk for worship. The Lord is also like a mother. He does not like to deprive his children of their food. Forgive me for my plain speaking, O King, but that is what you did! You ordered your people to bring all the milk they had for the worship, leaving nothing for the calves, the children, the aged and the sick. The people were unhappy, but they could not disobey you. So, they made the offering, but with a grudge. The Lord did not like this, and he showed his displeasure by not accepting your offering!"



The king stood lost in thought as he heard this. 'She's right,' he thought. 'A king is also supposed to be like a mother to his subjects, ensuring their health and happiness. But here, I was committing a grave sin by forcing them to give up their milk for my worship! How then could the Lord bless me?' A deep sense of shame crept over him.

He turned to the old woman and said, "I'm grateful to you, Mother. You've opened my eyes to the path of true devotion."

At once, he made an announcement that the following Monday, the people were required to bring only whatever milk remained after their calves, children, the aged and sick were fed.

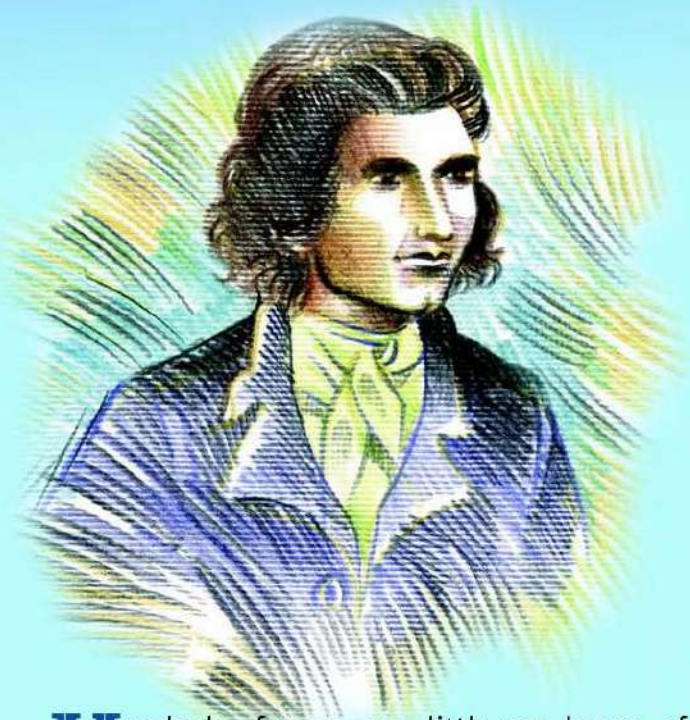
The next Monday – the last one of Shravan – also witnessed a long queue at the temple from early morning. However, people brought only as much milk as they could spare. The king also poured in the milk that was left after feeding his calves, children and others in the palace. The result was astonishing – the tank was full by mid-morning!

The king, now happy, waited for the old woman to arrive. After she had poured in her share of milk, he led her into the temple, and they performed the worship together.

"Thanks to you, Mother, the Lord is truly pleased at last!" declared the king. - *Retold by Rajee Raman*

The custom of serving a slice of lemon with fish dates back to the Middle Ages; the lemon was originally intented for remedial purposes rather than to flavour the fish. It was believed that if a person accidentally swallowed a fish bone, the lemon juice would disslove it.

RIDER INTO THE DARK CONTINENT



Hundreds of years ago, little was known of the huge Dark Continent of Africa. It was an enigma! Dense forests, arid deserts, and swollen rivers covered this great mass of land. Hostile cannibal tribes with monstrous natures and animals never seen elsewhere on earth or even in the wildest of dreams were the denizens of its jungles and deadly swamps. The craziest tales and legends were told about the place, of mountains piercing the sky, and of fathomless abysses. No daring explorer or map-maker had really made any headway deep into the African interior, for, the savage beasts and poisoned arrows of the dangerous natives forced them to turn back. One Dean Swift thus laughed at the adventurers of his time:

"Geographers on Afric maps
With savage pictures fill their gaps,
And o'er unhabitable downs
Place elephants for want of towns."

But at the end of the 18th century, European explorers turned their gaze towards one of the world's last great unexplored regions, the heart of Africa. They dreamt of finding the source of River Niger, walk the streets of Tellem on its bank, said to have been built entirely of gold, and look at the fabled city of Timbuktu. So, in 1788 the African Association was formed in London and seven years later none other than the intrepid Mungo Park was assigned to discover the River Niger, chart its course from the source to its termination and also visit the principal towns along its banks.

Son of a humble Scottish farmer, Mungo Park was born in 1771 in Foulshiels, Selkirk. As a boy he made astonishing progress in his studies, not only by his ready talents but by his remarkable perseverance and application. He soon distinguished himself as a botanist and then successfully completed a course in medicine. Young Mungo Park now went to London in search of employment and was appointed assistant surgeon on a ship. But "this upstanding, well-built young Scotsman, six foot high", with unusual talents and genius caught the attention of Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society and Treasurer of the African Association. It was on his recommendation that Mungo Park was given the offer to lead an expedition to Africa.

In fact, Major Daniel Houghton was earlier sent on this mission in 1790 but, unfortunately, he was robbed and left to die in the desert. Would the brave Mungo Park succeed or would he also meet a similar fate as that of his predecessor?

So on 22 May, 1795, the twenty-four year old explorer sailed from Portsmouth in a small trading vessel. On 2 December, bidding goodbye to his tutor he set out on his perilous journey. An English-speaking

Negro named Johnson and a black lad called Demba were his escorts. He rode on horseback, and his companions followed him on donkeys.

Soon the small daring party reached the kingdom of Bondu. Mungo Park put on his grand new blue coat with flowing tails and gold buttons and armed with his gorgeous umbrella appeared before the royal presence. His Majesty graciously accepted the umbrella as a gift. But he did not seem very happy. He had seen such things before. What really attracted him was his guest's blue coat and its shining buttons. After some hesitant hints, he asked for it downright. What could the explorer do but take it off and hand it over to the monarch?

Then the three continued on their way. They passed through thickets where wolves and hyenas glided across the moonlit paths, howling and yelling and creating an eerie atmosphere. They were robbed over and over again with shouts and insults. Suddenly Mungo Park realised that they were indeed passing through the Moorish kingdom of Ludamar reputed to be full of bandits.

While the explorer was hoping to quickly get out of the place and head for some friendly realm, Ali the tyrant king sent his soldiers who took him captive. "They asked thousands of questions," wrote Mungo Park, "inspected every part of my apparel, searching my pockets, and obliged me to unbutton my waistcoat and display the whiteness of my skin. They even counted my toes and fingers, as if they doubted whether I was in truth a human being." The magnificent beard which Mungo had grown was also an object of great curiosity. It is said that he was remembered for over a hundred years in that part of Africa as "Big Beard".

Alas, for the next four months his life became hell with continuous torture. It was the peak of summer. He lay chained in a stuffy little hut from where he could only crawl out into the scorching rays of the sun. At midnight he was given some boiled corn and filthy warm water. But more often, the lazy slaves forgot to bring him even that, and would thus neglect him for days together. He would have certainly died had not Ali's gentle wife, Fatima, secretly sent him morsels of food to save him from starvation.

"...I readily complied with every command, and patiently bore every insult; but never did any period of my life pass away so heavily; from sunrise to sunset I was obliged to suffer, with an unruffled countenance, the insults of the rudest savages in the world," recollected Mungo Park later with sadness.

At last, the heartless Ali, realising that there was nothing more to be got out of his prisoner, agreed to set him free. Mungo Park's boy Demba had already been sold to slavery and Johnson refused to proceed any further. So his master sent him back to Dr. Laidley, with a letter to say that everything was fine and he was about to resume his journey. Not a word did he write about all that he had gone through. For, he knew that beyond this darkness of pain and torture there shone the bright hope – the hope of discovering River Niger.

Soon this dauntless adventurer escaped from this terrible place and rode into the woods at the dead of night. All alone, with no provision and no money, he plodded on towards his destination. He passed through dense thickets infested with elephants, lions and leopards. He had no weapons of any kind. Yet he was fearless, for none of these wild animals, some of whom he encountered face to face, ever attacked him. He safely slept in the open. He met friendly natives who guided him on his way.

At dawn on 21 July, 1796, glistening before his weary eyes and flashing in the tender light of the rising sun, flowed the mighty Niger. "...Looking forwards, I saw with infinite pleasure, the great object of my mission – the long sought for majestic Niger, glittering in the morning sun, as broad as the Thames at Westminster, and flowing eastwards. I hastened to the brink, and having drunk of the water, lifted up my fervent thanks in prayer to the Great Ruler of all things, for having thus far crowned my endeavours with success." Mungo Park was the first European to gaze upon this great legendary river.

He reached the town of Segu, the capital of

Bambarra. But King Mansong refused to see the stranger and ordered him to leave the country while he spared his life. So Mungo Park had no option but to ride his lean little horse, till then meekly enduring all the hardships, and continued on his journey along the river. At this juncture, if it was not for the touching kindness and compassion of some African women, whose gesture he later fondly remembered with gratitude, he and his only companion would have perished of starvation.

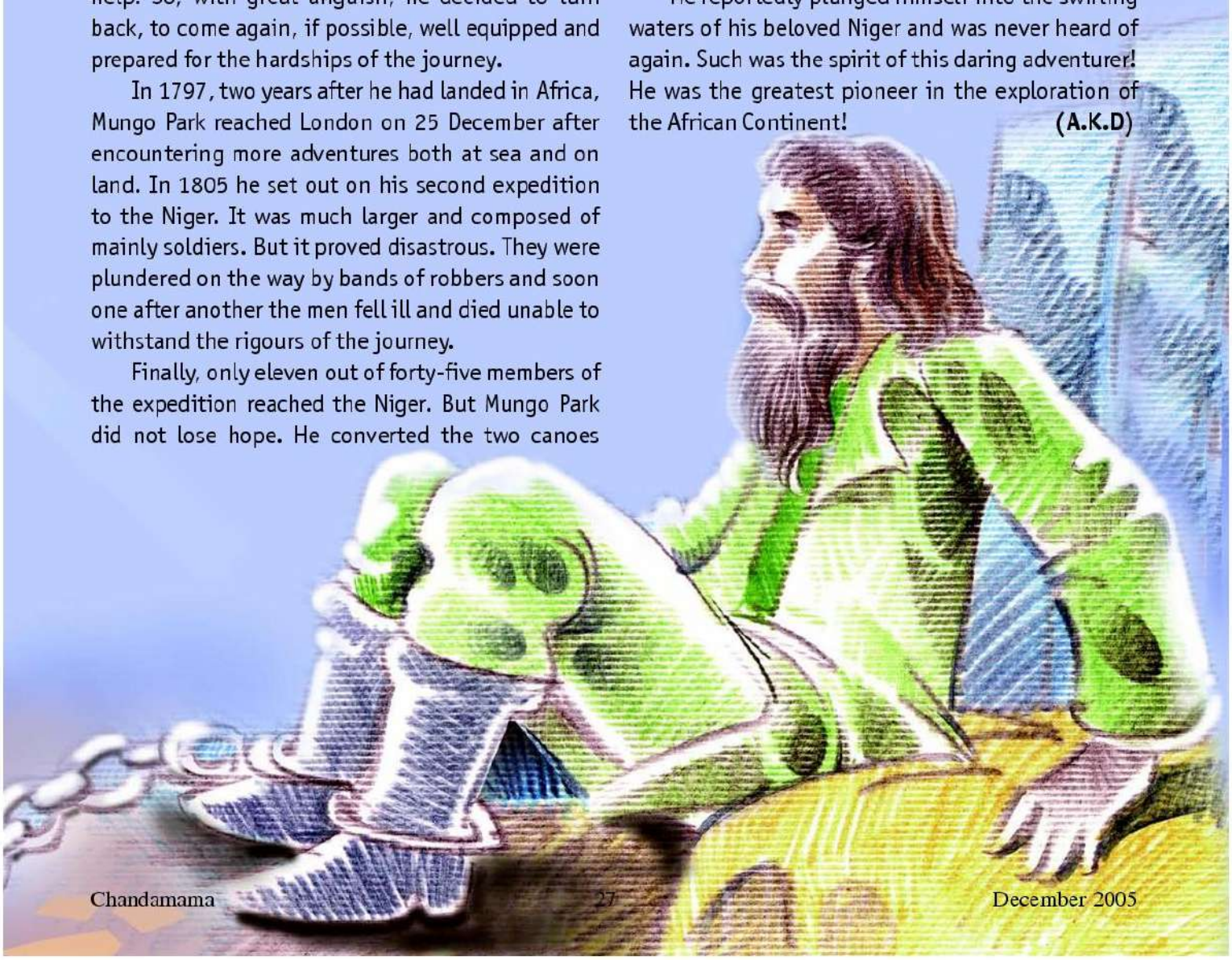
Now the rainy season had already set in and without a canoe it would be impossible to continue on his journey any further. He had no money with him to hire one. He was approaching the territories of the Moors from whom he did not expect any help. So, with great anguish, he decided to turn back, to come again, if possible, well equipped and prepared for the hardships of the journey.

In 1797, two years after he had landed in Africa, Mungo Park reached London on 25 December after encountering more adventures both at sea and on land. In 1805 he set out on his second expedition to the Niger. It was much larger and composed of mainly soldiers. But it proved disastrous. They were plundered on the way by bands of robbers and soon one after another the men fell ill and died unable to withstand the rigours of the journey.

Finally, only eleven out of forty-five members of the expedition reached the Niger. But Mungo Park did not lose hope. He converted the two canoes they had into a big boat and the surviving men sailed downstream with the aim of following the course of River Niger right up to where it ended. But sadly the boat struck a rugged rock and was damaged. Meanwhile the natives attacked them. Under the volley of spears and poisoned arrows the brave group of adventurers perished.

Before embarking on the final stage of the expedition Mungo Park had written: "I shall set sail for the east with the fixed resolution to discover the termination of the Niger or perish in the attempt though all the Europeans who are with me should die, and though I were myself half dead, I would persevere, and if I could not succeed in the object of my journey, I would at least die on the Niger."

He reportedly plunged himself into the swirling waters of his beloved Niger and was never heard of again. Such was the spirit of this daring adventurer! He was the greatest pioneer in the exploration of the African Continent! **(A.K.D)**



LEGENDS FROM OTHER LANDS (JAPAN)

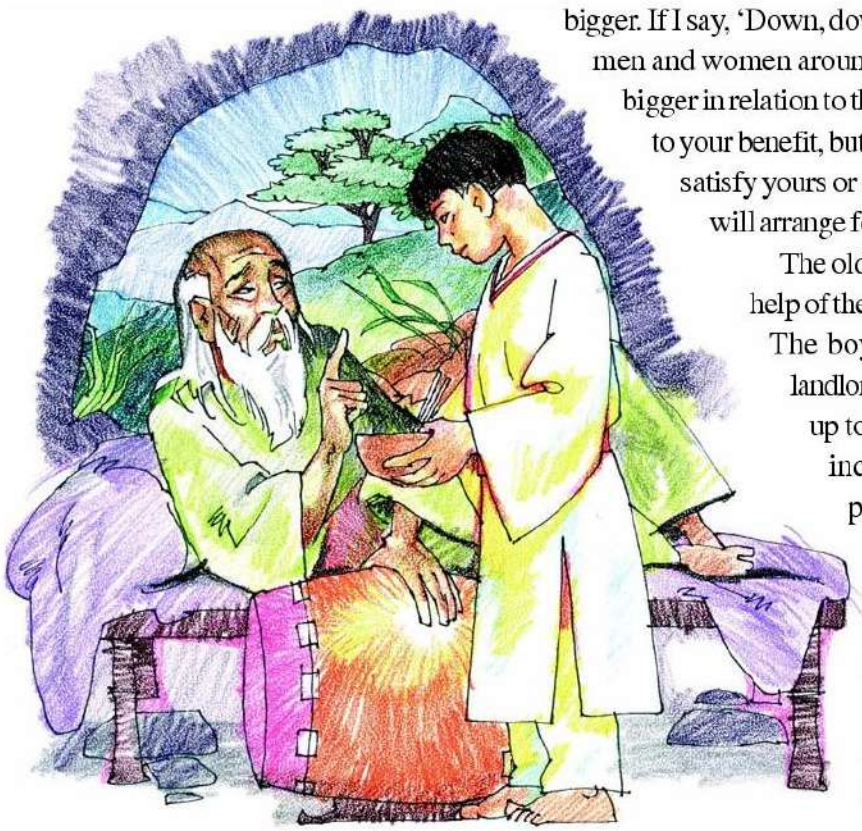
THE NOSE THAT

In one of the isles around the mainland of Japan there is a lake. Well, there are so many lakes here and there – you may comment and ask what is so special about it. In fact, there is nothing special about the lake; but special about a particular shoal of fish living in it. Nowhere else can be seen that sort of fish. It has unusually long noses.

It happened like this, says the legend:

Once upon a time there was a drummer who was hired to play his drum on the occasion of weddings and during festivities in the villages around the lake. He was poor –so poor that once when his hut collapsed in an earthquake, he found no means to build another hut. He quietly retired into a cave at the foot of the hill near the lake. As time went by, he grew old. Unable to play his drum, he was unable to earn and had hardly anything to eat. Some villagers took pity on him and left some food for him inside his cave at times.

The old man was dying when a village boy happened to see him. The boy fetched him some food and that proved to be the old man's last meal. He told the boy, "My son, I must reward you for your service. Here's my drum. Because I took loving care of it, it lately granted me a boon. If I play it while looking at someone's nose and muttering, 'Up,up', his or her nose would grow bigger. If I say, 'Down, down', It will become smaller. There are so many men and women around who feel their noses to be either smaller or bigger in relation to their faces. Take this as a gift from me and use it to your benefit, but remember, never use the power of the drum to satisfy yours or anybody else's curiosity. Well, boy, I hope you will arrange for my funeral when I am no more."



The old man died shortly thereafter. The boy, with the help of the villagers, saw to it that he had a decent funeral. The boy then began using the strange drum. The landlord's daughter had too small a nose. The boy went up to her and beat his drum chanting 'Up, up' and increased the size of her nose to match her face perfectly. That made him famous almost overnight. So many people came to him either to enhance the size of their noses or to reduce them. Known as the miracle drummer, the boy was amply rewarded for his services.

A couple of years passed and he was now a wealthy man. One day, alone near the lake, he felt an urge to see the maximum the drum could do. He lay down on his back and fixing

TOUCHED THE CLOUDS

his gaze on the tip of his nose, began chanting 'Up,up'! His nose started growing. What a fun! He observed that if he chanted faster, the nose too grew faster. He was in love with his performance. He went on with his 'Up,up' faster and faster and his nose, now looking like a tall bamboo pole, also kept on growing faster and faster. Its top touched the clouds.

Two huge eagles were attracted towards the unusual sight. They circled round it, to the young drummer's amusement. But one of them suddenly clamped its beak on the soft thing and the drummer felt a current of pain passing down to the base of his tower-like nose. He now began chanting 'Down,down' as rapidly as he could. But the eagle would not let go its hold. In fact, it tried to fly upward. As a result, the drummer was lifted up. He rose higher and higher as his nose became smaller and smaller. When he almost touched the eagle, the huge bird gave out a shrill cry. The moment its beak opened, the drummer fell off it and had a straight plunge into the lake. How sad! He had been changed into a fish with a long nose! It was too late for him to remember the warning given by the old drummer, that he must never use the drum for satisfying his curiosity. *(M.D.)*

FRIENDLY DOG

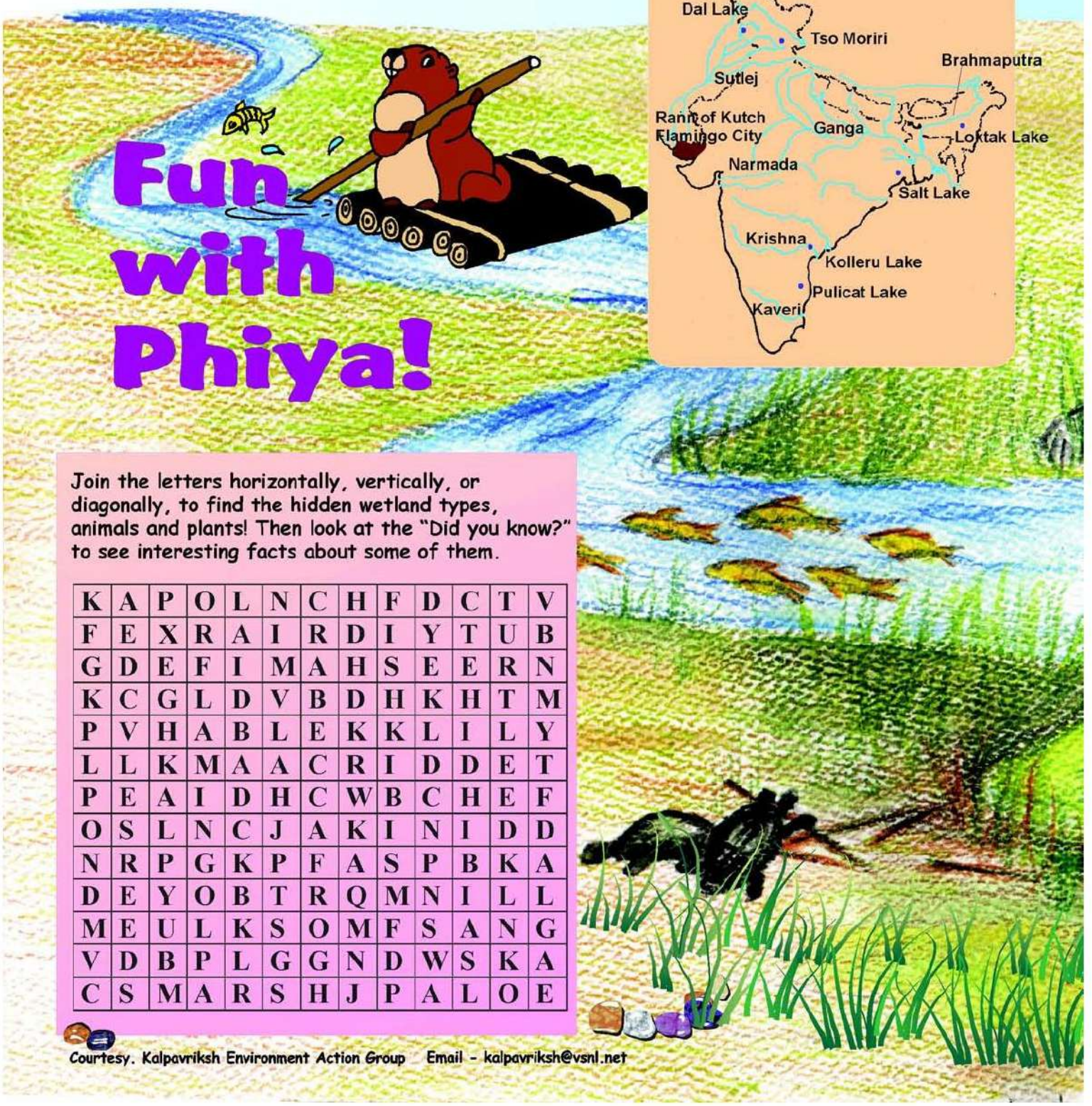
The deliveryman looked over the gate towards the house which was his package's destination, and saw a large and aggressive-looking dog on the lawn, staring at him. There was also a woman looking at him from an open first-floor window. He shouted to the woman, "Is your dog friendly?"

She said, "Yes." So the deliveryman opened the gate, and was promptly savaged by the dog.

When he had been rescued from the dog, the deliveryman angrily told the woman, "I thought you said your dog was friendly!" "He is," said the woman, "but that's not my dog."

Last month, my fish friend Mahseer asked me: "Have you ever seen a wetland?" I said, "Of course, when it rains any land is wet, no?!?" Mahseer grinned and told me that a wetland is actually a special kind of ecosystem, where land is under water for most part of the year. It dawned on me only then that the huge lakes in my homeland of Ladakh are wetlands!

I was curious to see what other wetlands we have in India. So Mahseer and I went on a wet, wet India tour! We avoided the coasts since we had already travelled there (remember, in September I told you all about marine areas?).



Fun with Phiya!

Join the letters horizontally, vertically, or diagonally, to find the hidden wetland types, animals and plants! Then look at the "Did you know?" to see interesting facts about some of them.

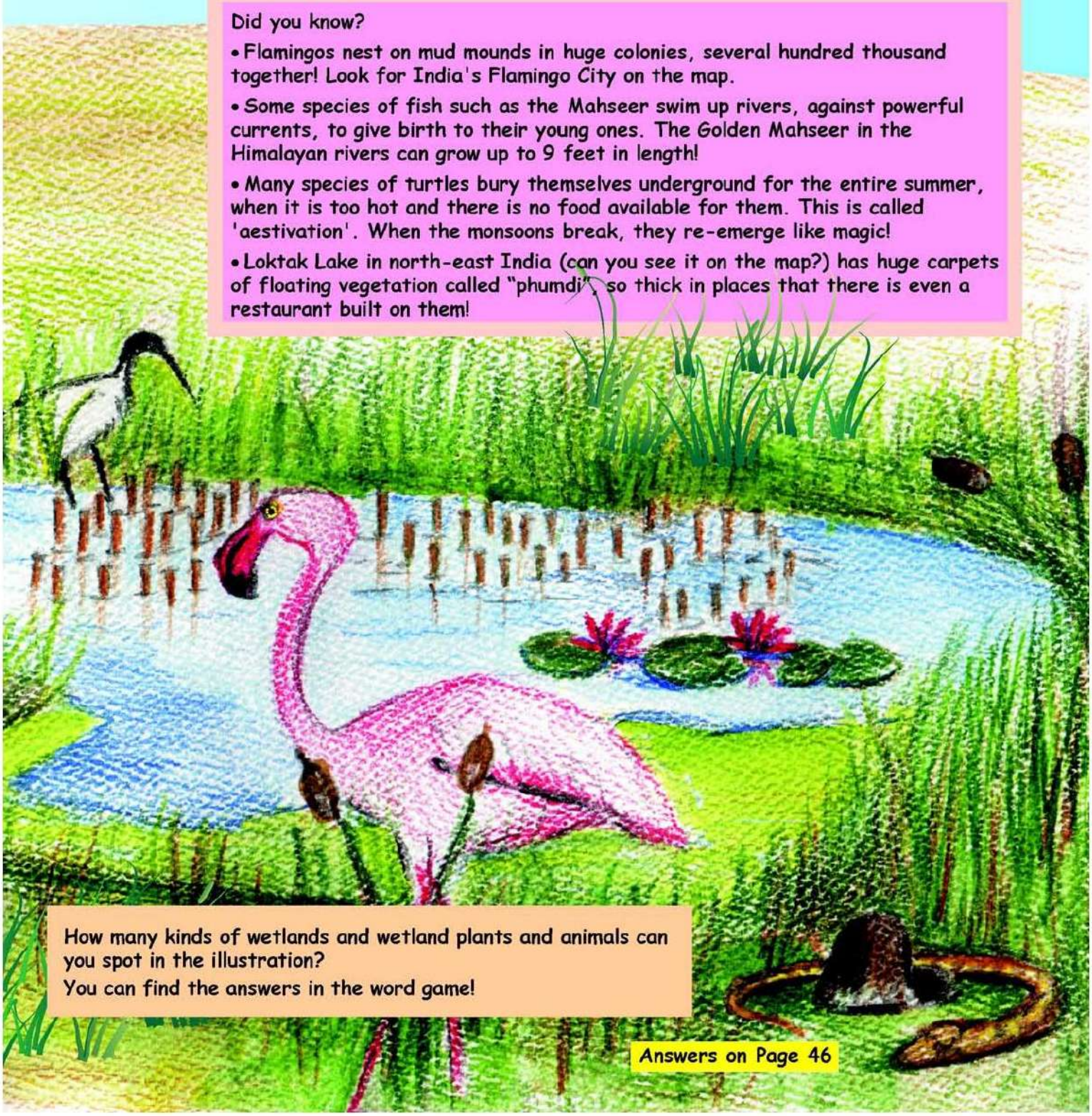
K	A	P	O	L	N	C	H	F	D	C	T	V
F	E	X	R	A	I	R	D	I	Y	T	U	B
G	D	E	F	I	M	A	H	S	E	E	R	N
K	C	G	L	D	V	B	D	H	K	H	T	M
P	V	H	A	B	L	E	K	K	L	I	L	Y
L	L	K	M	A	A	C	R	I	D	D	E	T
P	E	A	I	D	H	C	W	B	C	H	E	F
O	S	L	N	C	J	A	K	I	N	I	D	D
N	R	P	G	K	P	F	A	S	P	B	K	A
D	E	Y	O	B	T	R	Q	M	N	I	L	L
M	E	U	L	K	S	O	M	F	S	A	N	G
V	D	B	P	L	G	G	N	D	W	S	K	A
C	S	M	A	R	S	H	J	P	A	L	O	E

Courtesy. Kalpavriksh Environment Action Group Email - kalpavriksh@vsnl.net

You will see some of the important wetlands marked on the map, but do remember that every water body, even a little pond near your house, is an important water source that supports aquatic life. We rafted down the mighty Himalayan rivers (it was very scary!), rowed quietly across several huge lakes in South India (much easier!), waded knee-deep in the marshes in northern India (slushy!) and skipped flat stones in the innumerable village ponds in eastern India (sorry, Croc uncle, we nearly hit you!). We bumped into a lot of our animal and plant friends, which are adapted to living in these wetlands. I'll introduce you to some of them on this page.

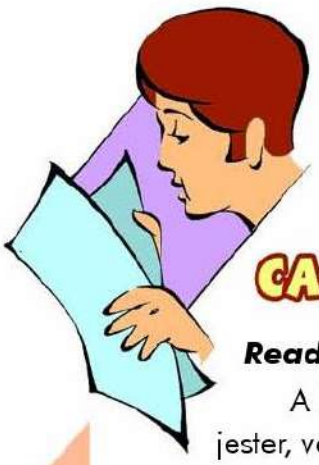
Did you know?

- Flamingos nest on mud mounds in huge colonies, several hundred thousand together! Look for India's Flamingo City on the map.
- Some species of fish such as the Mahseer swim up rivers, against powerful currents, to give birth to their young ones. The Golden Mahseer in the Himalayan rivers can grow up to 9 feet in length!
- Many species of turtles bury themselves underground for the entire summer, when it is too hot and there is no food available for them. This is called 'aestivation'. When the monsoons break, they re-emerge like magic!
- Loktak Lake in north-east India (can you see it on the map?) has huge carpets of floating vegetation called "phumdi", so thick in places that there is even a restaurant built on them!



How many kinds of wetlands and wetland plants and animals can you spot in the illustration?
You can find the answers in the word game!

Answers on Page 46



READ AND REACT

A NOVEL CONTEST FOR READERS
CASH PRIZE OF RS. 250 FOR THE BEST ENTRY

Read the story below:

A king, who could never control his laughter whenever he listened to the court jester, very much wanted to laugh at the jester's expense. It was, of course, not so easy to do that. The jester never gave an opportunity to the king.

One day, the king was out for a stroll, accompanied by his courtiers. They saw the jester on his horse coming from the opposite direction. He dismounted as soon as he saw the king and bowed to him.

The king thought it was the opportunity that he had long been waiting for. "Hello, my good jester. Isn't it funny that your horse is so strong and stout while you're so lean and weak?" commented the king.

Now imagine what would have been the jester's response. Did his answer evoke laughter in the king and the courtiers? Or was the king put to shame?

Complete the story in 100 to 150 words. Give it a suitable title, and mail your entry, along with the coupon below, in an envelope marked "Read and React".

(N.B. This is the last contest in the series. -*Editor*)

CLOSING DATE : December 31, 2005

Name ----------Age----------Date of birth----------

School ----------Class----------

Home address----------

---------- PIN code ----------

Parent's signature Participant's signature

CHANDAMAMA INDIA LIMITED

82 Defence Officers Colony, Ekkatuthangal, Chennai - 600 097.

GENABI

Abishek studied in Class 6 of St. Patrick's school. He didn't get very good marks, although he studied for 5 hours every day. The results of the quarterly exams were out and he had failed. Disappointed, he decided to go fishing in a nearby lake.

To add to his disappointment, there appeared to be no fish in the lake. Suddenly, after half an hour, he felt a tug on the rod. He pulled with all his strength and, at the end, he found a pot hooked to the rod. When he opened the pot, a genie suddenly swished out and said, "You have 3 wishes."

Abishek said, "I wish to pass with flying colours in the next exam."

"Secondly, I want to win prizes in all the school competitions."

The next day, there was an announcement made in the school. A dance competition was going to be held. Abishek gave his name and started preparing. But, on the D-day, he felt scared on seeing so many people in the hall. So, when his name was mentioned, he wished his third wish and asked the genie to join him on the stage!

The genie danced beautifully, and the audience gave them a big hand. In the end, the winners were... Abi and genie, GENABI!

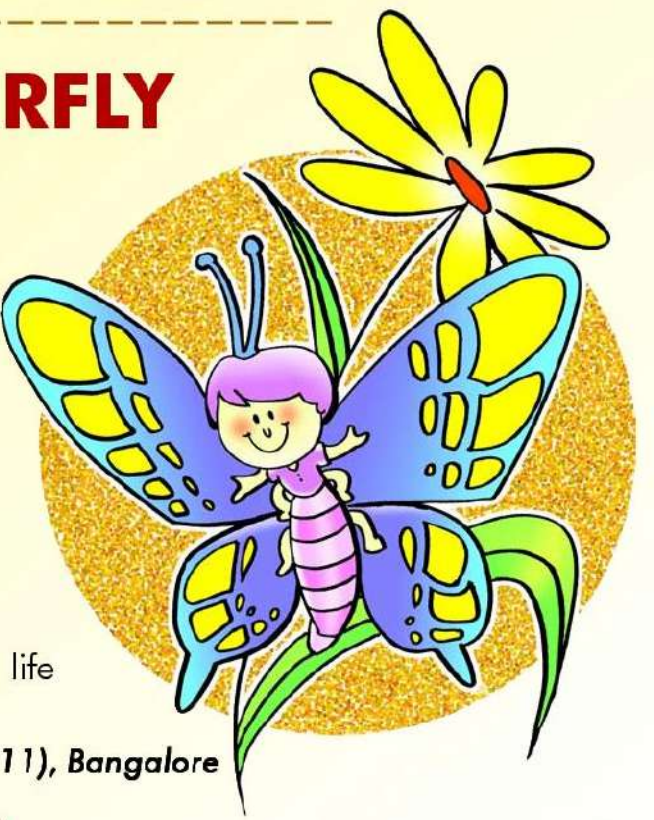
G.S. Anush (11), Sohar

NOBLE DEED

Imagine if you are a seed
Which can help many a poor
people feed
Don't be like a weed
Help the one in need
As it is a noble deed.
Never be in an angry mood
It makes you behave rude.
Never tell a lie
When you're alive.
Don't be proud nor loud
If you can follow the above deeds
You can lead a life with great
speed.

- S. Vismitha Katyayani (11)
Bangalore

BUTTERFLY



If I were a butterfly
I would never be shy.
I would always be busy
And never act like a sissy.
I would not stand and stare
But look around everywhere.
Nor praise my wings all the time
From morning till night.
I might last only for a week
But till the end I promise to be meek.
So I thank Him for giving me a precious life
A precious life of a butterfly.

- Sarada Mahesh (11), Bangalore

Auto-driver (*on reaching destination*) : The fare has come to Rs. 90.
Ramu : Take Rs. 60.
Driver : How is it possible?
Ramu : Besides my son, you also travelled in the auto. My son and I shall pay Rs. 30 each.

- V. Saran Chaitanya, Kurnool

Taxi Driver (*after stopping the car*) : Sir, we've run out of petrol. The car won't move forward.
Passenger : All right, then move it backward.

-B. Shiva Ravali (12), Hyderabad

Woman passenger (in a hurry) : Can I take this train to Delhi?
Station Master : Sorry, ma'am, you can't. It's too heavy for you to carry!

-Manaswini Panda (14), Delhi

Raju : Last night, I dreamt that I fell off my bike and suffered injuries on my head.
Ramu : You're a fool! You should have worn a helmet when you went to bed!

- S. Akaash (12), Trichur

Siva : Mummy, why is the fridge shaking?
Mother : Maybe it's feeling cold.

- Vijayalakshmi (11), Avadi

Rose : Jack says I'm pretty; but Nick says I'm ugly. What do ***you*** think, John?
John : You're both– pretty ugly.

-Twisha Reemun (10), Kolkata

Father : Deepa, have you prepared for your exam?
Deepa : Yes, Daddy. I've sharpened my pencils, ironed my uniform, polished my shoes, and got my writing pad ready.

-P. Aishwarya (14), Chennai - 17

RIVERS OF INDIA CROSSWORD

T	A	K	R	I	S	H	N	A	S	I
A	U	Y	R	E	V	U	A	C	A	D
D	G	N	T	G	B	J	L	R	T	A
A	V	J	G	A	N	G	A	T	L	N
M	S	H	O	A	N	U	M	G	U	A
R	I	N	M	N	B	U	U	V	J	H
A	N	I	A	S	E	H	M	F	G	A
N	D	E	T	W	S	I	A	A	H	M
J	U	S	I	Q	V	K	W	D	Y	G
A	R	T	U	P	A	M	H	A	R	B
I	G	O	D	A	V	A	R	I	F	A

Twelve major rivers of India, which flow the length and breadth of the country, are given in this crossword. Spot them out across, down, diagonally, and in reverse. Have fun spotting them.

- Karthik Bhushan(14) Udupi, Karnataka

RIDDLES

1. A horse was tied to a 15ft rope; but it could walk 30ft. How?

2. How can you drop an egg from a height of 10ft without breaking it?

- G. Ravi Teja (14), Nellore

3. Which tongue do we use to speak?

- P. Malavika (9), Chennai

4. It has cities, but no houses; it has rivers, but no water in them; it has forests, but no trees. What is it?

- Tanushree Krishna, Hosur

5. Which is the hottest day?

6. Which ass is the female of lad?

- Manjushree B.L. (13), Chitradurga

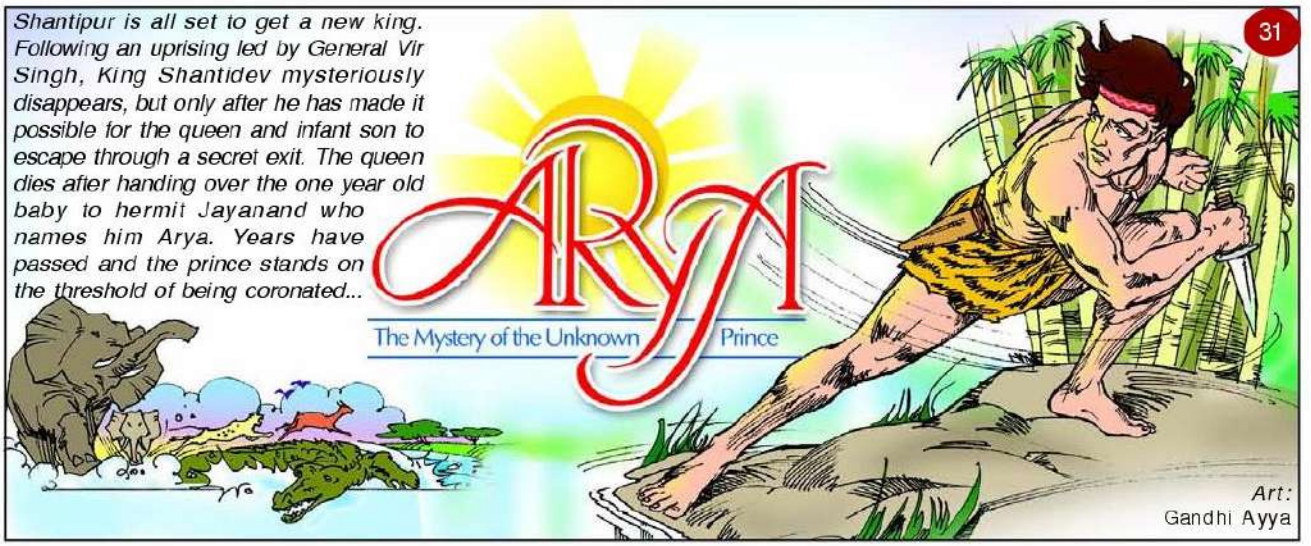
7. Five dozen keys, but not one will open a door.

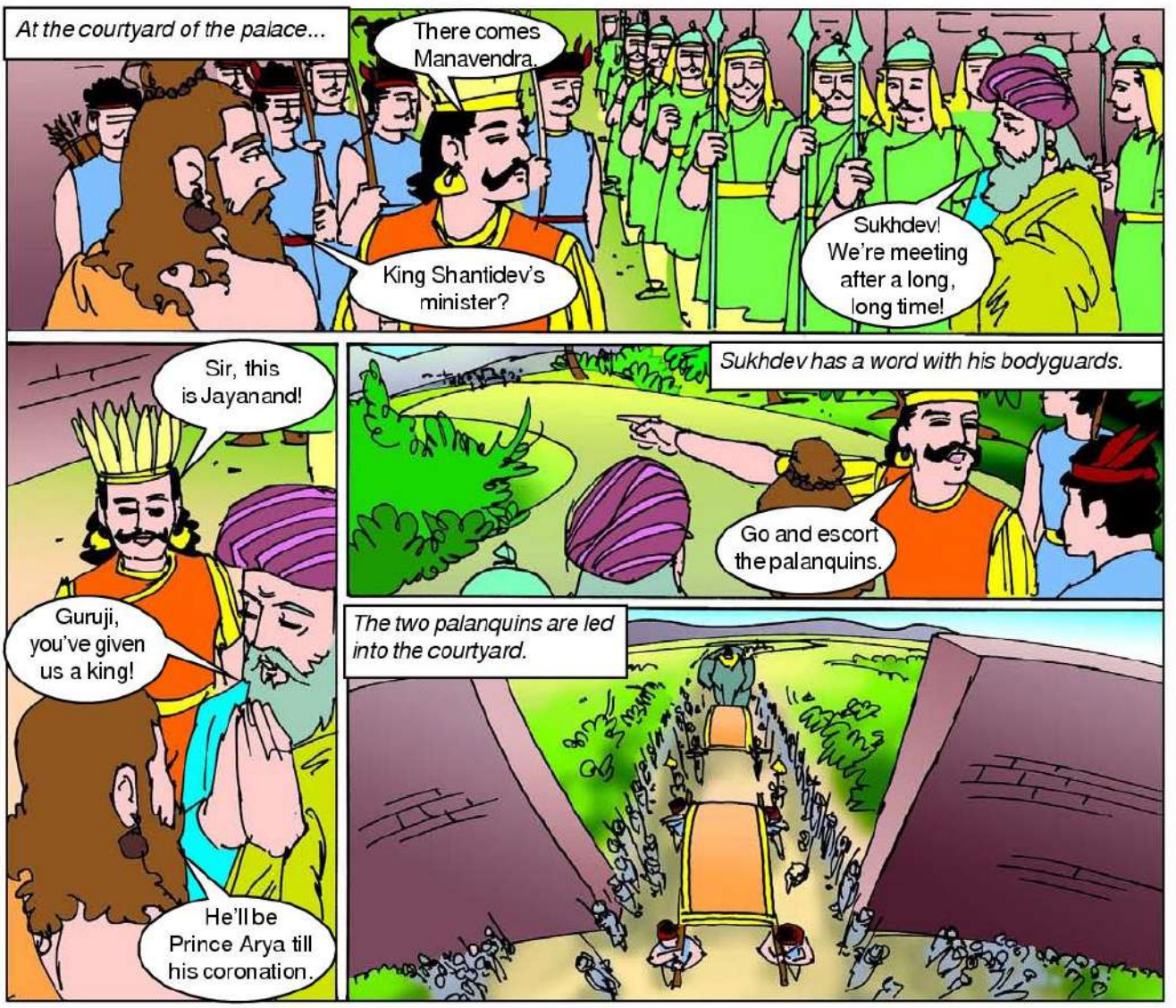
- G.T. Kumar (14), Jaggayyapet

Answers for RIDDLES:

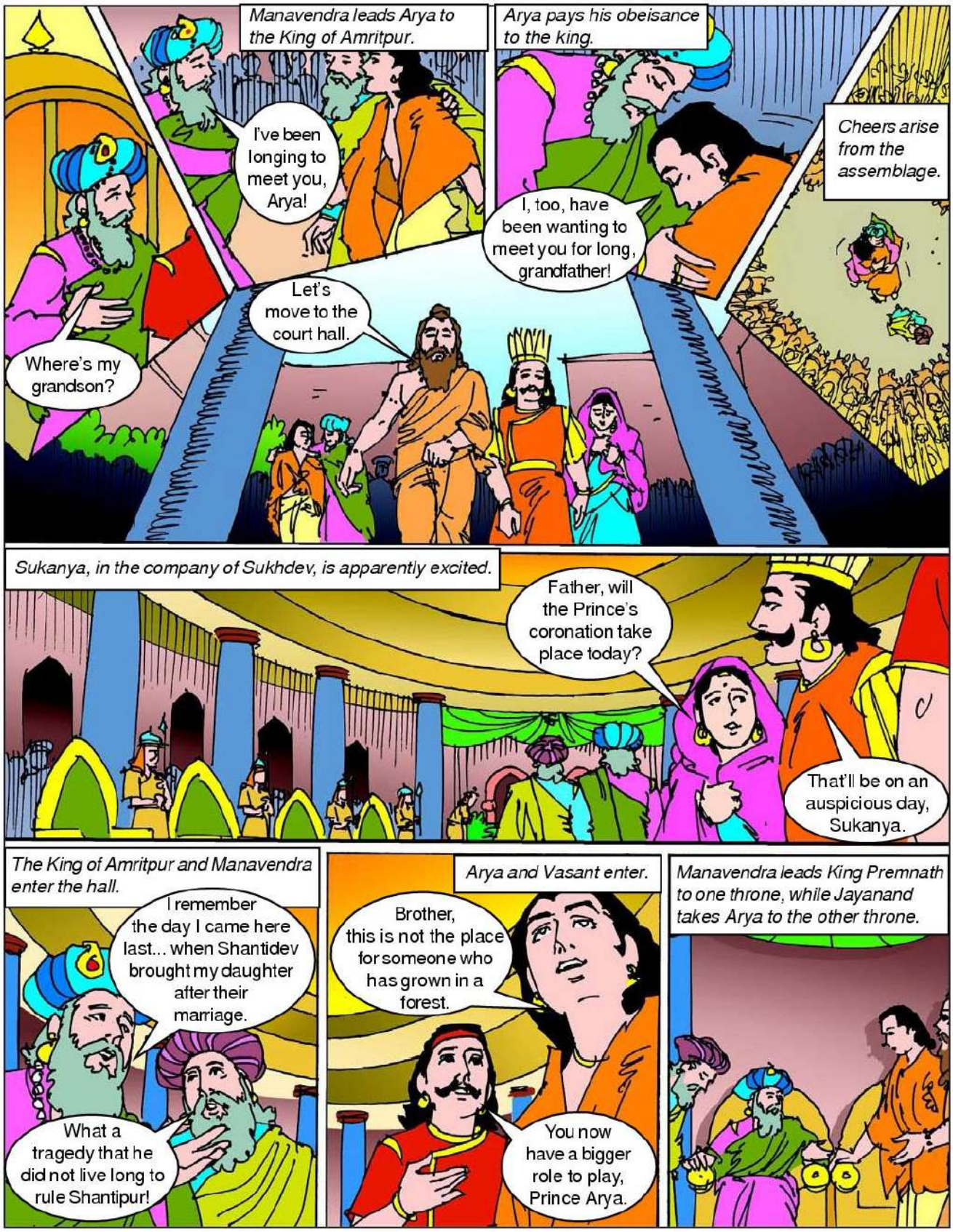
1. The rope was not tied to anything, 2. Drop it 11ft; the egg won't break for the first 10 ft., 3. Mother-tongue, 4. Map, 5. Sun-day, 6. Lass, 7. Piano keys.

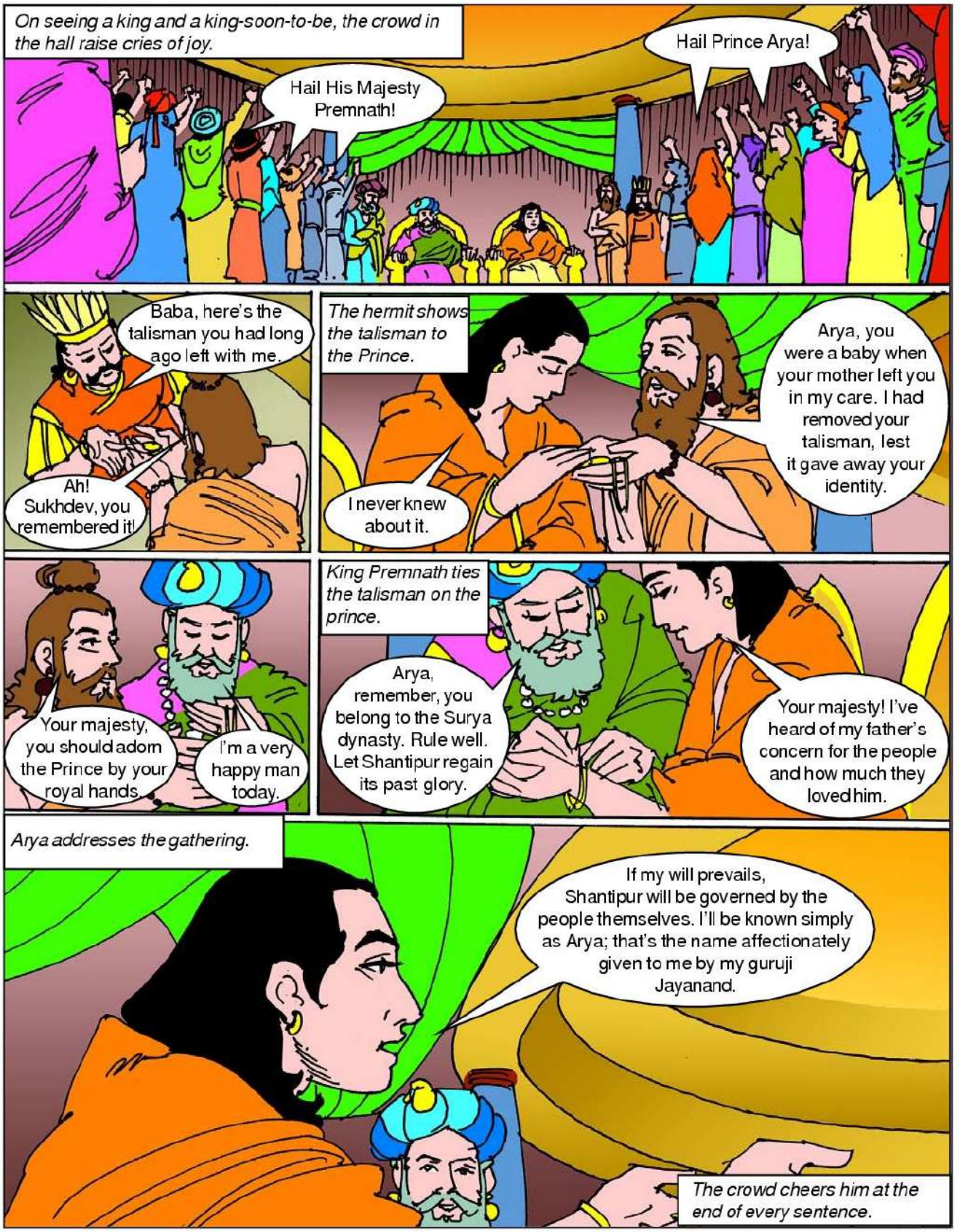
Solution to ANIMAL CROSSWORD:

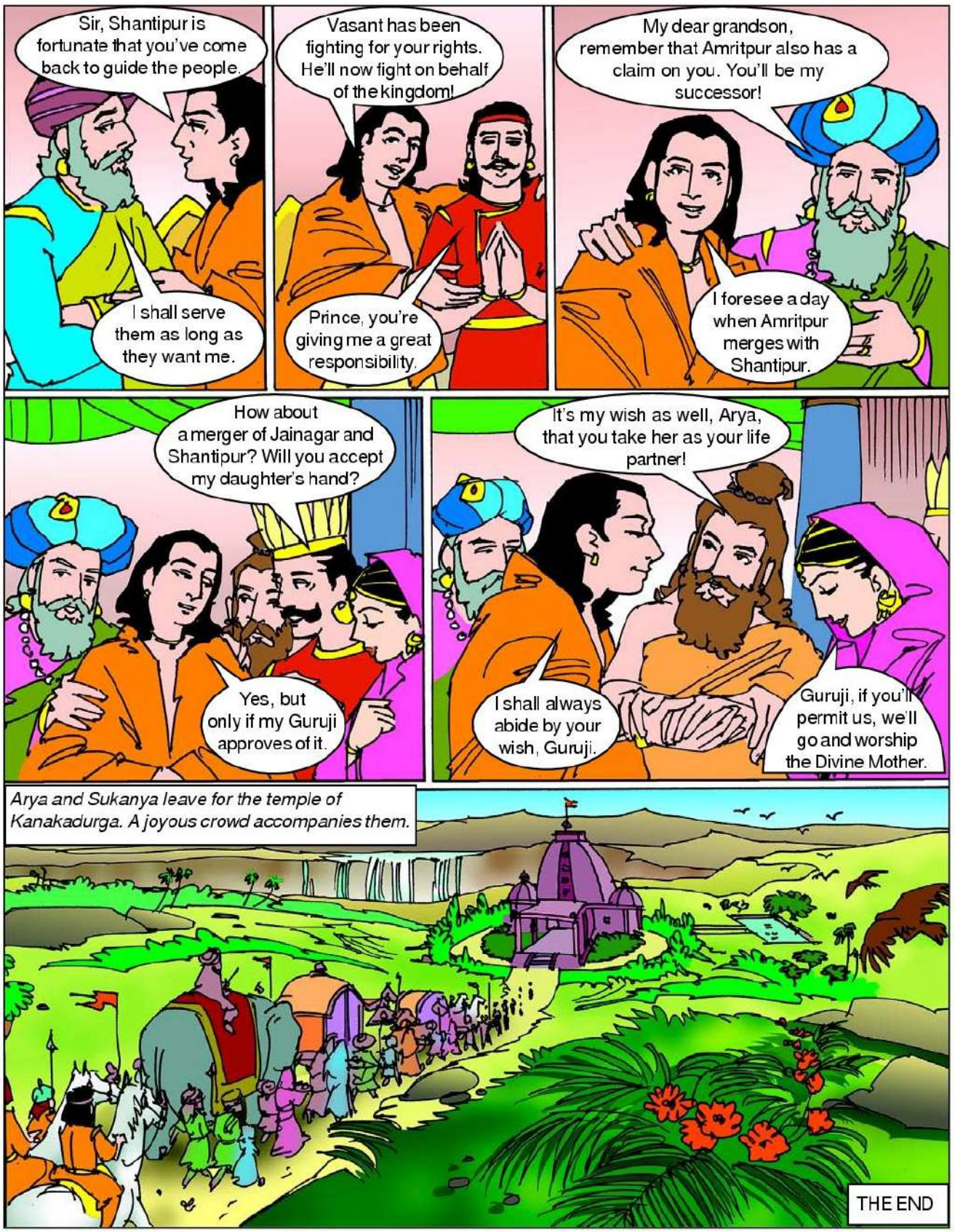

Shantipur is all set to get a new king. Following an uprising led by General Vir Singh, King Shantidev mysteriously disappears, but only after he has made it possible for the queen and infant son to escape through a secret exit. The queen dies after handing over the one year old baby to hermit Jayanand who names him Arya. Years have passed and the prince stands on the threshold of being coronated...
31
ARYA
The Mystery of the Unknown Prince
Art: Gandhi Ayya

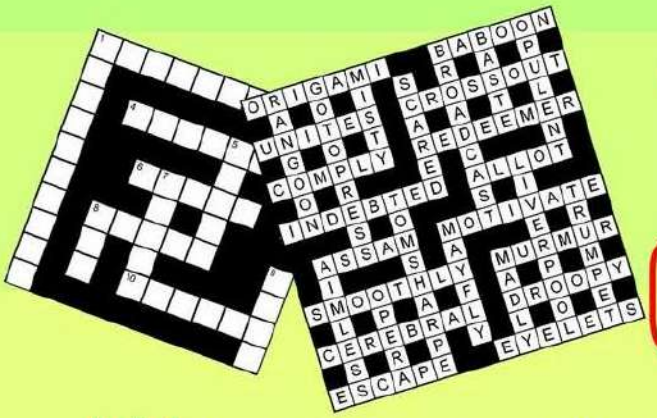

At the courtyard of the palace...
There comes Manavendra.
King Shantidev's minister?
Sukhdev! We're meeting after a long, long time!
Sukhdev has a word with his bodyguards.
Go and escort the palanquins.
Sir, this is Jayanand!
Guruji, you've given us a king!
He'll be Prince Arya till his coronation.
The two palanquins are led into the courtyard.

Arya steps out of his palanquin first.
Welcome to the capital, Prince Arya!
I'm really overwhelmed!
Arya receives a warm embrace from the Chieftain.
Manavendra has been waiting for you, Arya.
Sir, I'm blessed by your presence!
Shantipur is fortunate to get a king after so many years.
Arya joins hermit Jayanand.
Where's my grandfather?
He'll be here soon.
A chariot is seen fast approaching the palace.
There comes King Premnath.
Vasant is escorting him!
Vasant dismounts to allow the chariot to pass through the gates.


Manavendra leads Arya to the King of Amritpur.
I've been longing to meet you, Arya!
Where's my grandson?
Let's move to the court hall.
Arya pays his obeisance to the king.
I, too, have been wanting to meet you for long, grandfather!
Cheers arise from the assemblage.
Sukanya, in the company of Sukhdev, is apparently excited.
Father, will the Prince's coronation take place today?
That'll be on an auspicious day, Sukanya.
The King of Amritpur and Manavendra enter the hall.
I remember the day I came here last... when Shantidev brought my daughter after their marriage.
What a tragedy that he did not live long to rule Shantipur!
Arya and Vasant enter.
Brother, this is not the place for someone who has grown in a forest.
You now have a bigger role to play, Prince Arya.
Manavendra leads King Premnath to one throne, while Jayanand takes Arya to the other throne.


On seeing a king and a king-soon-to-be, the crowd in the hall raise cries of joy.
Hail His Majesty Premnath!
Hail Prince Arya!
Baba, here's the talisman you had long ago left with me.
Ah! Sukhdev, you remembered it!
The hermit shows the talisman to the Prince.
Arya, you were a baby when your mother left you in my care. I had removed your talisman, lest it gave away your identity.
I never knew about it.
Your majesty, you should adorn the Prince by your royal hands.
I'm a very happy man today.
King Premnath ties the talisman on the prince.
Arya, remember, you belong to the Surya dynasty. Rule well. Let Shantipur regain its past glory.
Your majesty! I've heard of my father's concern for the people and how much they loved him.
Arya addresses the gathering.
If my will prevails, Shantipur will be governed by the people themselves. I'll be known simply as Arya; that's the name affectionately given to me by my guruji Jayanand.
The crowd cheers him at the end of every sentence.


Sir, Shantipur is fortunate that you've come back to guide the people.
I shall serve them as long as they want me.
Vasant has been fighting for your rights. He'll now fight on behalf of the kingdom!
Prince, you're giving me a great responsibility.
My dear grandson, remember that Amritpur also has a claim on you. You'll be my successor!
I foresee a day when Amritpur merges with Shantipur.
How about a merger of Jainagar and Shantipur? Will you accept my daughter's hand?
Yes, but only if my Guruji approves of it.
It's my wish as well, Arya, that you take her as your life partner!
I shall always abide by your wish, Guruji.
Guruji, if you'll permit us, we'll go and worship the Divine Mother.
Arya and Sukanya leave for the temple of Kanakadurga. A joyous crowd accompanies them.
THE END



The birth of CROSSWORD

Who doesn't like riddles and puzzles? Who doesn't want challenges? Challenges help us grow in every way. Games and sports lead us to good health. Mental puzzles sharpen our brains. Crossword puzzles belong to this genre.

Crossword puzzles were not around till Sunday, December 21, 1913. On that day, the first crossword appeared in the magazine section of the *New York World*. The objective was to provide more variety and thus to increase the paper's circulation. Other publications, too, saw the benefits latent in carrying crossword puzzles and got into the act.

Crossword puzzles are now found in almost all newspapers and magazines. Even language newspapers and magazines publish them. They come in blocks of white and black. Numbers starting with 1 appear sequentially. The last number will depend on the size of the crossword puzzle. The numbers are found in some of the white columns. On the side or below the puzzle, two sets of clues are provided. One is named ACROSS; the other is referred to as DOWN. The number of letters in the word/ words in the correct answer is given in brackets.

Clues take many forms.

One type of clues is called Anagram. An anagram is nothing but a new word obtained by rearranging the letters of another word. Anagrams of quite a large number of words yield new words. Take the word SMILE. Its anagrams are MILES, LIMES, and SLIME. The clue also hints that one can get the answer by using anagram.

Here is one clue: Juggling NEW RON leads to FAME (6).

Juggling a hint that anagram is to be tried. The solution is a word of 6 letters.

Which are the words to be juggled around? We then spot the words NEW and RON. We shuffle the letters till we get the 6-letter-word, RENOWN. We know that RENOWN is another word for FAME.

Here are a few words that tell us to seek the answer through anagrams. The words are SORT OUT, PLAT AROUND, RERARRANGE, SHUFFLE, TURN AROUND. This list is endless. The learner gets to know them with practice.

A *second* type of clue speaks of IN, INSET, INLAID, INSIDE, FROM, etc. The words hint that the solution is embedded in the clue itself. Look at the two clues below:

Change from real terror (5)

Manage with some cash and learn. (6)

Check the sequence of letters.

In the first case, we need a word of five letters. Start with CHANGE, then drop C and take the next five letters that reads HANGE. Move on dropping the letter at the left and taking a new letter from the right till . . . we land on the word ALTER. It means CHANGE. In the second case, taking six letters at a time, and moving forward we finally get the word HANDLE.

A *third* type of clue speaks of RETREAT or GO BACK or RETURN etc. It hints that the solution is inlaid in the clue, but one has to read backwards. Take the clues below:

Does murder reverse the percussion instrument? (4)

Rules of language go back in a ram marginally. (7)

In the fist clue, the first four letters of the word MURDER in reverse to give the word DRUM which is a percussion instrument. In the second clue, we land when we read 7 letters backwards at every step, on the word

GRAMMAR. The *fourth* type of clue uses words with more than one meaning. Here are two clues:

Whip on the eye (4)

Give a loan and go ahead (7)

LASH means WHIP. Yet EYELASH is not a whip. One goes ahead to ADVANCE. Yet a loan is also called ADVANCE. So to solve such clues, we need to know the many meanings of words. The dictionary or the thesaurus helps.

The *fifth* type of clue uses words that sound alike. Let us work on two clues.

In the days of King Arthur, he heralds the time after sunset. (6).

He sped off on a horse taking the wrong road. (4)

Time after sunset is NIGHT. Who hasn't heard of King Arthur's KNIGHTS? ROAD sounds like RODE that means SPED OFF ON A HORSE.

The *sixth* type of clue relies on chipping or adding on. The cue is given through words CUT, CHOP, DROP, TAKE ON, ADD, etc.

Look at these two clues:

Pleader not starting becomes the man at the front (6).

Sight grabs in to gain special understanding (7).

Take the word PLEADER. Drop the first letter. We get the word LEADER. Add the word IN to SIGHT and end up with the word INSIGHT.

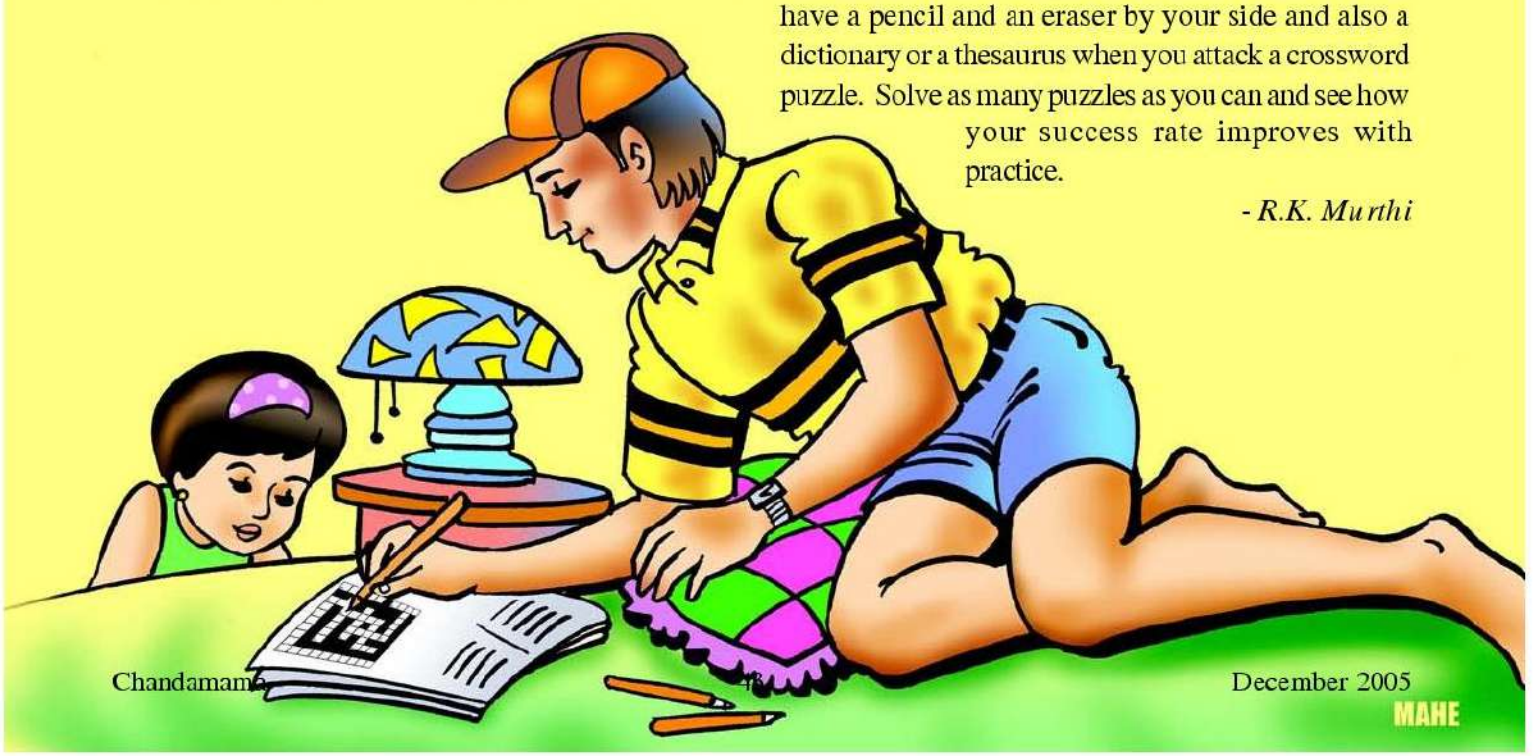
Other things that go into the clues are abbreviations: AC for account; BC for before Christ etc; names of men and women and boys and girls; titles of books, etc. We learn how they enhance the appeal of the crossword puzzle over the years. Here is one clue that belongs to this type:

Scenic beauty gets sandwiched between parents (8)

The number in bracket tells us that the solution is a word with eight letters. PARENTS lead us to PA and MA. Since the clue says: Girl sandwiched between parents, it is possible that the word begins with PA and ends with MA. That leaves space for a four-letter name of a girl. Many names come to mind. But only the name NORA fits in. Then we get the word PA-NO-RA-MA, which stands for scenic beauty.

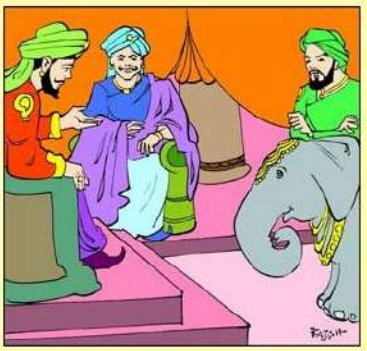
You are now ready to tackle the crossword puzzle. Where do you find one? You find it in almost every magazine and newspaper. Ah! You are optimistic of becoming an expert in solving crossword puzzles? Remember that an optimist is one who tries to solve a crossword puzzle with pen and finds soon enough that some of the letters he has put in just aren't right. So better have a pencil and an eraser by your side and also a dictionary or a thesaurus when you attack a crossword puzzle. Solve as many puzzles as you can and see how your success rate improves with practice.

- R.K. Murthi



MAHE

PRIZE-WINNING 'REACTION'



The clever minister (February)

The minister saw through Mohan Singh's game. He was a wealthy landlord, jealous of his neighbour, Chandan Singh. It was his greed to earn favours from the king that had prompted him to buy a baby elephant and gift it to the king. The minister explained this to the king and advised him to teach him a lesson. On his advice, the king gave away to Mohan Singh the elephantine pumpkin which Chandan Singh had earlier presented. Being a gift from the king, Mohan Singh could not but accept it.

Abhishek Vilas Potnis (13), Borivali (W), Mumbai - 400 091

The correct choice (March)

The Zamindar's wife was surprised when he chose Vasant for the post of sentry, though he was found asleep the next day when he was supposed to work in the garden. He told her, "It shows that he was awake all night guarding the treasury, and naturally he fell asleep the next day. On the other hand, Vir, who did sentry duty the previous day, was found active in the garden the next day. It could be surmised that he must have slept in the night, when he was expected to be alert." The woman was happy that the Zamindar had made the correct choice.

S. Anantharaghavan (14), Ramnagar (N) Extn., Madipakkam, Chennai 91

Miser's miser (April)

Zamindar Jagveera was stunned when the pujari called it an insult on seeing him place a ten paise coin on the tray and suggested an extra offering of ten paise. The zamindar said like a bomb blast, "I don't want to insult the Lord twice." He coolly took away the coin - the only coin - from the tray and walked out of the temple. The pujari could see a glee on the face of the miser, for having saved ten paise.

Shalini Gaur (13), Dehra Dun, Uttaranchal - 248 001

Every rupee counts (May)

When his father sent away three cabs without engaging even one of them to go to the town, the miser's son was naturally flummoxed. Especially because they had by then already covered part of the way. To the son's query, the miser pointed out how the drivers were charging a higher and higher fare for shorter distances. "The third driver wanted Rs. 20, but we are nearer to our destination. So, let's walk the distance!" The son protested, "But father, you really wanted to travel by taxi!" He realised what kind of miser his father was. He meekly followed him, on foot.

K.P. Sarat Chandran (12), Chandranagar, Palakkad - 678 007

(Compare with the story that appeared in the respective month)

Why doubt? (June)

Paramasiva's children were happy when he brought home the lovely looking parrot. They showed it to their mother. "Isn't it the most beautiful bird in the world?" Before she could say anything, the parrot said, "Why doubt?" The children were quite excited. Soon Paramasiva realised that the parrot had been taught to say only two words: "Why doubt?" Naturally, he felt cheated. At one moment he thought he should take back the bird to the shopkeeper. But he did not have the heart to disappoint his children. He merely told them that they should try and teach the parrot to speak other words.

-P.V.L. Deepti(14), Anushaktinagar, Mumbai 400 094

Faster than light (July)

The court jester justified his claim thus: "My lord, you will agree with me that light is faster than sound, but mind is faster than even light. If my mind thinks of a country, far away from here, I can reach there in no time and every place, every sight there, will come before my mind. As my mind can travel that far in a second, I can really claim that I'm the fastest creature in the world, my lord." The king turned to the courtiers and found them nodding their head. "You deserve a prize," said the king as he extended his hand to pick up a bag of gold coins. The jester put on a beaming smile.

-Nachiket S.Dongre (13), Bhusawal, Jalgaon 425 201

The mental hospital (August)

Gopal was scared as the man was slowly approaching him. He jumped off his seat and ran like mad. He saw the lift in front of him. Luckily the door was open. He quickly got into the lift and shut the door. In his excitement, he fumbled with the switches. But before the lift could move, the door opened and the inmate of the hospital chasing him was inside. And he was already closing the door. Gopal managed to push himself out, the door closed, and the lift began moving up. Gopal heaved a sigh of relief when he heard a voice, "What happened?" It was one of the nurses. Gopal blurted out: "Leather slippers! Boiled or fried?" The nurse took his hands and led him to a room. The door had the board: "DOCTOR".

-Priyadarshan J.Babu (10), Chinchpokli, Mumbai 400 012

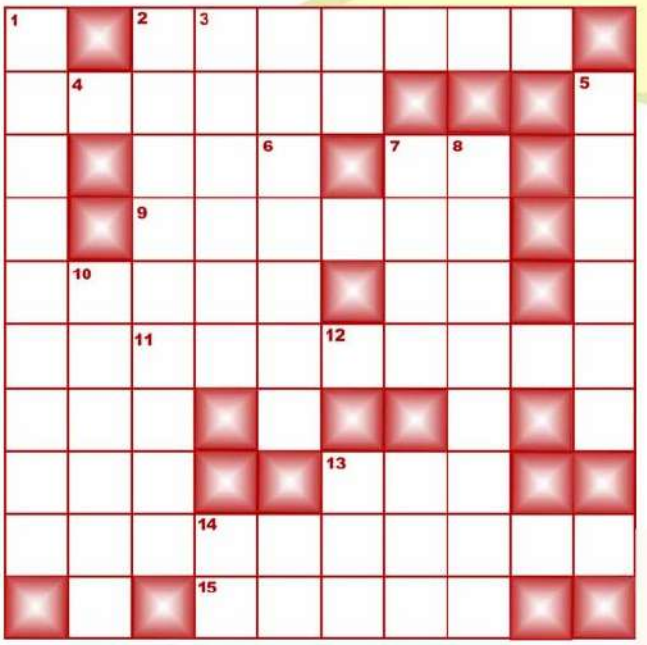
A friend indeed (September)

Gautam knew that Subhas was a miser and guessed he would not have fed his donkey properly. That's why it was behaving strangely. He, therefore, suggested that he could leave the donkey with him for a few days. The donkey was given proper food, and Guatam trained the animal to obey orders. The donkey surprisingly responded. Subhas felt ashamed of his miserliness. He was grateful to Gautam.

-A.Christabel Anjani (12), Seevaram, Chennai 600 096

PUZZLE DAZZLE

Currencies of the World Crossword



Here is a crossword on Currencies of the World. Have fun solving it.

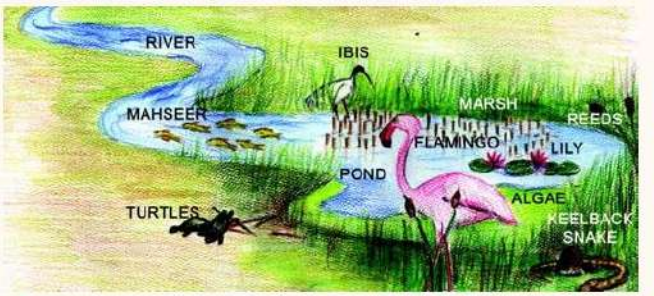
Down:

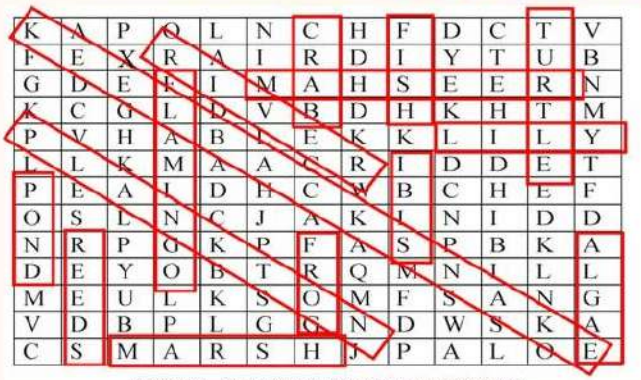
1. Austrians call their currency like this (9).
2. An American currency. This name is also given to the currencies of Australia, Canada and Singapore (6).
3. This is Indonesia's currency (6).
5. In Malaysia the currency is referred like this (6).
6. In France the currency is known by this name (5).
7. The currency of Philippines is referred like this (4).
8. In Denmark, the people call their currency like this (5).
10. The currency in Russia is given this name (6).
11. This is the currency of Iran (4).

Across:

2. This is the Greek currency (7).
4. In UK the currency is known by this name (5).
9. The Italian currency (4).
12. In Vietnam the currency is known like this (4).
13. Korean currency (3).
14. In Afghanistan the name given to the currency is ___ (7).
15. In India and Sri Lanka the currency is referred by this name (6).

ANSWERS FOR FUN WITH PHIYA PUZZLES :





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F	E	X	R	A	I	R	D	I	Y	T	U	B
G	D	E	E	I	M	A	H	S	E	E	R	N
K	C	G	L	D	V	B	D	H	K	H	T	M
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N	R	P	O	K	P	F	A	S	P	B	K	A
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M	E	U	L	K	S	O	M	F	S	A	N	G
V	D	B	P	L	G	G	N	D	W	S	K	A
C	S	M	A	R	S	H	J	P	A	L	O	E

ANSWERS FOR PUZZLE DAZZLE :

Down: 1. Schilling; 2. Dollar; 3. Rupiah; 5. Ringit; 6. Franc; 7. Peso; 8. Krone; 10. Rouble; 11. Rial.

Across: 2. Drachma; 4. Pound; 9. Lira; 12. Dong; 13. Won; 14. Afghani; 15. Rupee.

Gold-coated Beard

The day was just a few hours old. Mulla Nasruddin opened the front door and stepped out of his house into the front courtyard. A cool breeze ruffled his hair and gently caressed his face. The wind took along dry leaves, made them scurry along the gravel path and play tunes that Nasruddin had in his head.

'This is a fine day to just sit with friends, singing folk songs, cracking jokes, sipping drinks,' he told himself. He knew that the villagers would join him if he pulled a stringed bamboo cot out into to the courtyard and sat on it, doing nothing but admiring the scene around. That was what he did. Soon a neighbour, Khalil, came out of his house, noticed Nasruddin and greeted him.

"*Salaam alaikum*," said Khalil.

"*Alaikum salaam*," grinned Nasruddin.

"What a fine day!" said Khalil, while he started moving toward his donkey, tied to a stake driven into the ground, outside the courtyard of his house.

"Yet you won't sit and enjoy the day. Instead, you will work all day long tilling the land and turning the earth around, preparing it for the next crop. Can't that wait for the morrow? One doesn't find such fine days often. It is a gift of the Gods. So, let us enjoy, today. Come, friend. I have room for you on the cot," Nasruddin drew slightly to one side to give enough space for Khalil.

"You're right. Who wants to break one's back at work when one has a chance to enjoy the cool breeze and also the company of a good friend," Khalil joined Nasruddin on the cot.

Khalil's wife, who had come out to hand over the plough, saw him sitting with Narsuddin and screamed in anger. "You good for nothing man! The field is waiting to be tilled and readied for the next crop. Who will do that if you spend time in gossip?"

"Don't you know, dear, that such a fine day, a gift of the Gods, is not meant to be wasted at work?" Khalil repeated the words of Nasruddin.

"Fine days won't feed hungry mouths. Hard work does," she raved and ranted, but Khalil ignored her. Finally, she stormed back into the house, after hurling the plough in the direction of the cot. The plough flew in space, giving both Nasruddin and Khalil a real fright. But luckily for them, the flying missile missed the cot by inches.

"Your Begum has good marksmanship," joked Nasruddin.

"She practices the art by hurling pots and pans at me, but not once has she managed to make a hit," Khalil laughed.

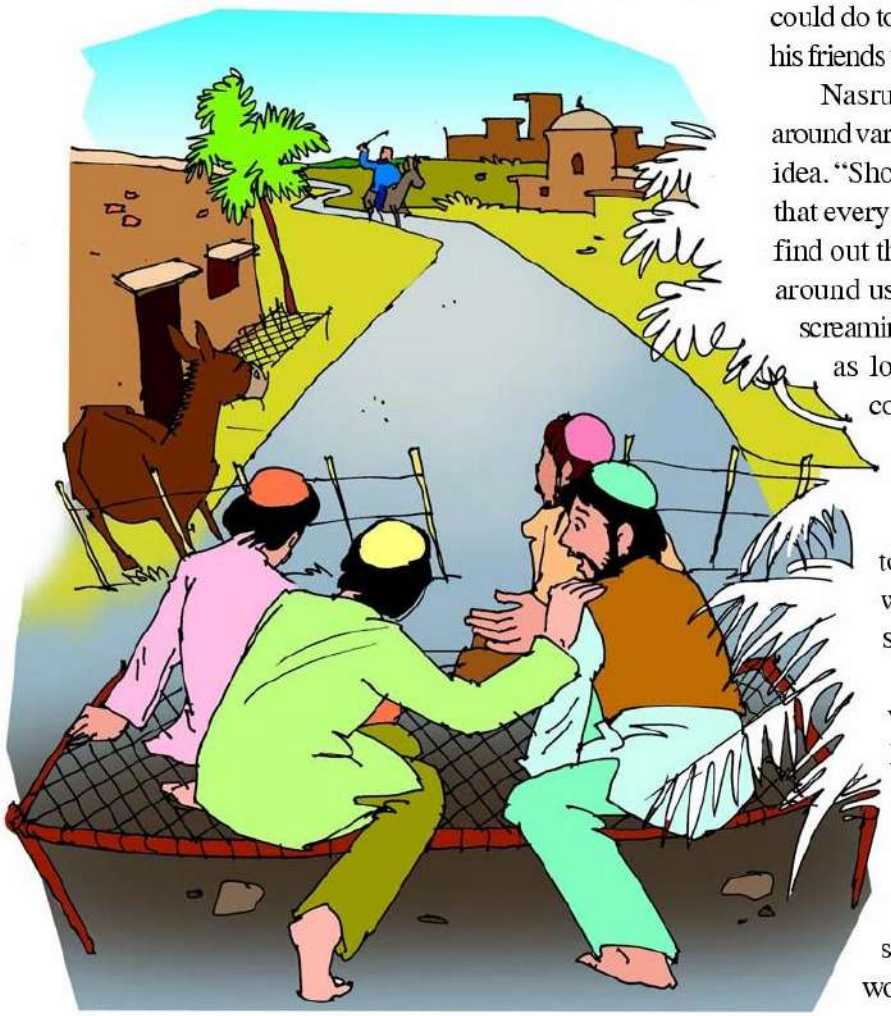
Soon two more villagers joined them.

The foursome sat around, indulging in merry banter and loud laughter. They would have continued in this vein but for the persistent high-pitched neighs of a donkey heard from quite some distance. The men looked out to check who was coming. Their eyes fell on a man, riding a donkey, whirling the whip in the air, trying to make the donkey move faster. It took them some time to recognise the rider Akramuddin, the local tax official.

"O Allah! Why do you spoil a fine day by bringing this pest to our doors?" Khalil groaned.

"He must be on his tax collection round," Nasruddin's face fell.

"Why can't he be like us, enjoy a fine day by taking a day's break form work?" Khalil sighed, before adding, "What do we do now?"



All the men had their fears. They had not paid taxes for the last three years. Akramuddin had sent his men a dozen times to the village, earlier. But the villagers turned them away, saying they would need some more time to raise the money. On the last occasion, after failing to collect even one Shekel, the men went off, after warning the villagers that if they did not pay up the dues within a month, Akramuddin would himself come to collect the taxes. "When he comes, you better pay up. Otherwise, your homes and fields would be confiscated. And all of you will be held behind bars."

Nasruddin remembered the warning. So did the three men who sat with him. They gaped, at each other, unsure of the future. How could they get out of trouble?

"Nasruddin, you are our only hope. Tell us what we could do to send Akramuddin back, empty handed?" his friends turned to him hopefully.

Nasruddin sank into deep thought. He turned around various possible options. Finally he got a bright idea. "Shout at the top of your voices. Shout so loud that everyone who hears the shouts will come out to find out the reason. I want a large crowd to gather around us before Akramuddin arrives. Here I go screaming," Nasruddin let out a scream that sounded as loud as the crack of lightning. His three companions, too, had rather loud and sharp voices. They shouted together, producing high decibel notes. Men, women and children came out of their homes. They ran towards the four men, wondering why they were bringing the village down by creating such a cacophony of loud notes.

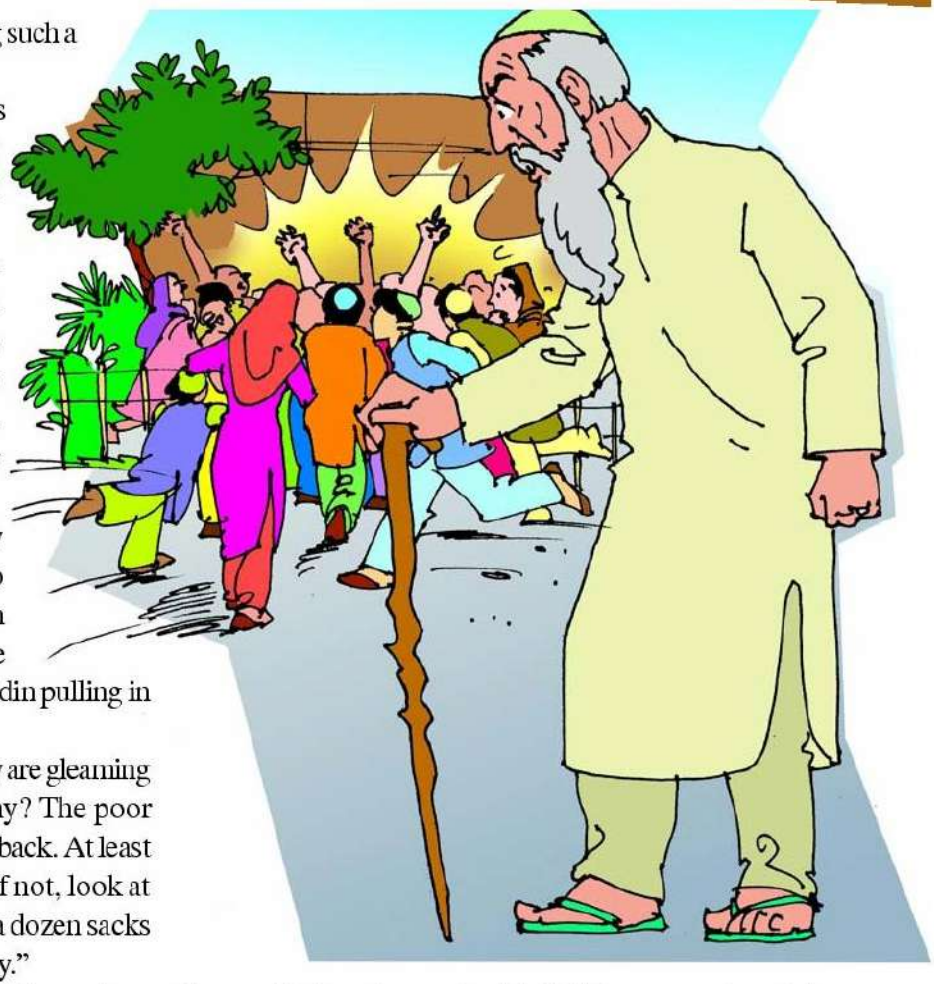
"They have gone mad," said an old villager, hobbling toward the group, with the help of a stout stick. "I shall bring them back to their senses. A couple of none-too-gentle knocks with the stick should silence them." But he could not get near them in time. For the four men on the cot were now surrounded by a large crowd, men and women and children, young and old. The crowd

wanted to know why the men were making such a racket.

Nasruddin smiled at them, and held his finger out toward the rider who was heading toward them while saying, "Look at that man on donkey's back."

Some of the villagers recognised the rider immediately. "O Allah! Why bring him here when we are totally unprepared to handle his demand. We won't give away our hard earned money to this rascal. Doesn't he know that money does not grow on trees?" they moaned.

"He won't get a Shekel from us. I know what to do. And, once we get together into the act, he will run for his life," Nasruddin gave them room for hope, but before he could explain his plan, he found Akramuddin pulling in the reins and getting off the donkey.



"Look into the eyes of the donkey. They are gleaming with joy," Nasruddin joked. "Know why? The poor animal is happy the heavy weight is off its back. At least for now! Ever seen a fat lump of flesh. If not, look at Akramuddin. I believe he is heavier than a dozen sacks of grain. I think he grows fatter day by day."

"He fattens himself with our money. Allah knows how much of the taxes he collects goes to the treasury," groaned the old man, swinging his stick.

"Most of it he pockets," said Khalil, his tone bitter.

"And he grows fatter and fatter day by day. Yet the donkey has to take him wherever he wants to go. I am afraid if he doesn't check his weight, some day in the near future the donkey will collapse under him and he will lie spread-eagled on the dusty road," Nasruddin joked.

A merry twitter filled the air.

Akramuddin took some time to adjust the folds of his dress and to shake off the dust that clung to his clothes.

"*Salaam alaikum*," Nasruddin broke through the crowd and ran to greet Akramuddin

"*Alaikum salaam*," Akramuddin replied, but his tone was brash and stern.

"Everything about you speak of wealth," Nasruddin lowered his voice and added, "Even your beard." Akramuddin held his head up, proudly.

"Ah, my friend," Nasruddin held Akramuddin in a warm hug, before raising his voice to a high pitch to make himself heard by everyone around. "We're honoured to have you in our midst. Rarely do we ever have the rich come to our village. Rare still are men who flaunt their wealth so openly. That is where you, Akramuddin, are different."

Akramuddin was taken aback. He could not make out what Nasruddin had in mind. He gave Nasruddin a stern stare and almost started demanding the payment of taxes, but found his voice drowned by Nasruddin's loud-pitched words, "Friends, come over here. See how rich he is. Do you know that his beard is gold coated?"

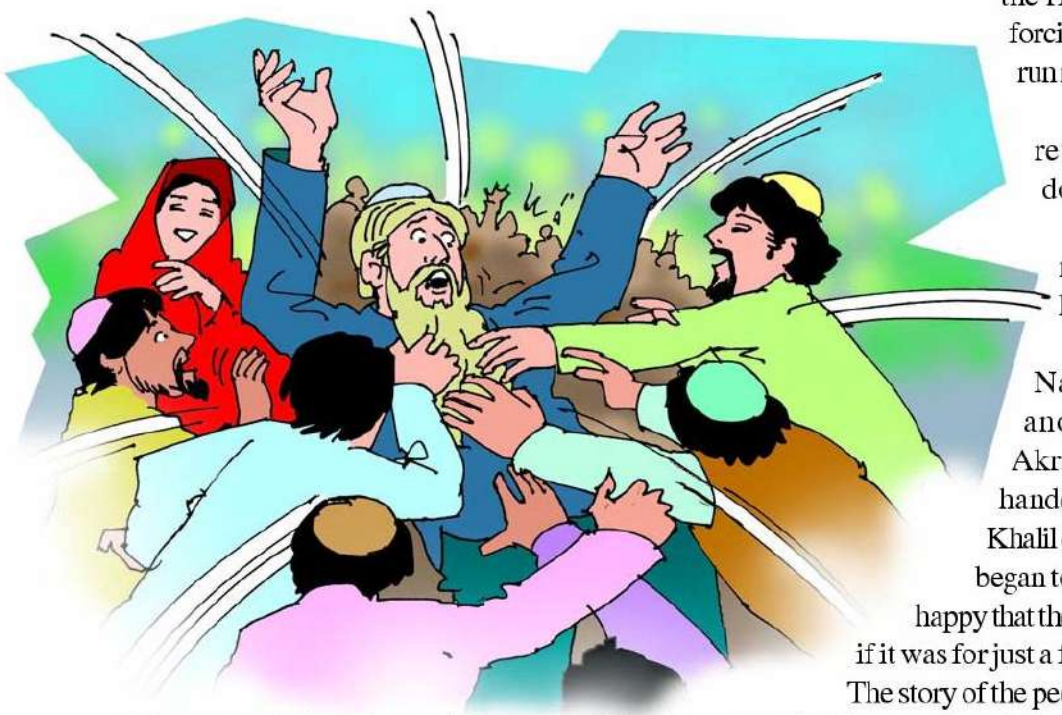
"Silly," hissed Akramuddin, but his words got drowned in the noise raised by the mob that encircled him.

"Don't listen to him. I assure you every strand of his beard is dipped in gold," Nasruddin raised his voice still higher and said, "This is your golden chance to get a rare souvenir. Not every day do you get a chance to collect gold-coated strands! Don't miss this opportunity. You may not get it again."

Then began a mad melee.

The crowd pushed and jostled. A dozen hands got hold of Akramuddin's beard. Each one tried to gather as many strands of the beard he or she could.

"Leave me, you fools! Ever heard of beards being dipped in gold!" he tried to free himself, but failed. He winced in pain as a few men moved back, looking happy because they held in their hands strands of golden hair.



"It hurts, you fools," Akramuddin screamed, but his words fell on deaf ears. He tried to back away, but he was pinned down by a swarm of people, each one eager to get hold of as many golden strands as possible.

"Oh, you're killing me!" Akramuddin pushed his elbows and kicked with his feet, but he could not break free. Then his eyes fell on Nasruddin.

"Ah, my friend Nasruddin. You're a wise old man. *You* know that my beard is not coated in gold. Make these fools realize that," he begged.

"I shall, but promise you will recommend to the Caliph to write off the tax we owe. Tell him that this area had suffered drought for three years, continuously. We got nothing from our fields. We're starving," Nasruddin waited.

"I shall do whatever you tell me. Let me go," Akramuddin begged.

Nasruddin waved his hand and the crowd fell back.

"Allah is great!" Akramuddin sighed, as he quickly hurried to his donkey.

"Stay for lunch," Nasruddin grinned.

"Oh no, I won't spend a second more here," Akramuddin croaked, swung on to the back of the donkey, got hold of the reins, kicked it rather sharply, in the ribs, with his booted feet, forcing the animal to take to the run right away.

The crowd watched the retreating figure on the donkey's back happily.

"He'll be back," the old man tapped the ground with his stout stick.

"Why bother? We have Nasruddin. He'll find yet another trick to send Akramuddin back, empty-handed, if he comes again," Khalil danced with joy. The crowd began to sing and dance with him, happy that the danger had receded, even if it was for just a few days.

The story of the people vying with each other to get hold of strands of his beard that they believed were dipped in gold spread. Soon the news reached the Caliph, too. He laughed and he laughed till he could laugh no more. Next day, when Akramuddin appeared at the royal court to complain, the Caliph gently reached out for his beard. "May I have a strand of gold?" He rocked with laughter again, before adding, "Write off all tax dues of everyone in Nasruddin's village. That's the reward we give him for entertaining us, making us laugh."

- R.K.Murthi

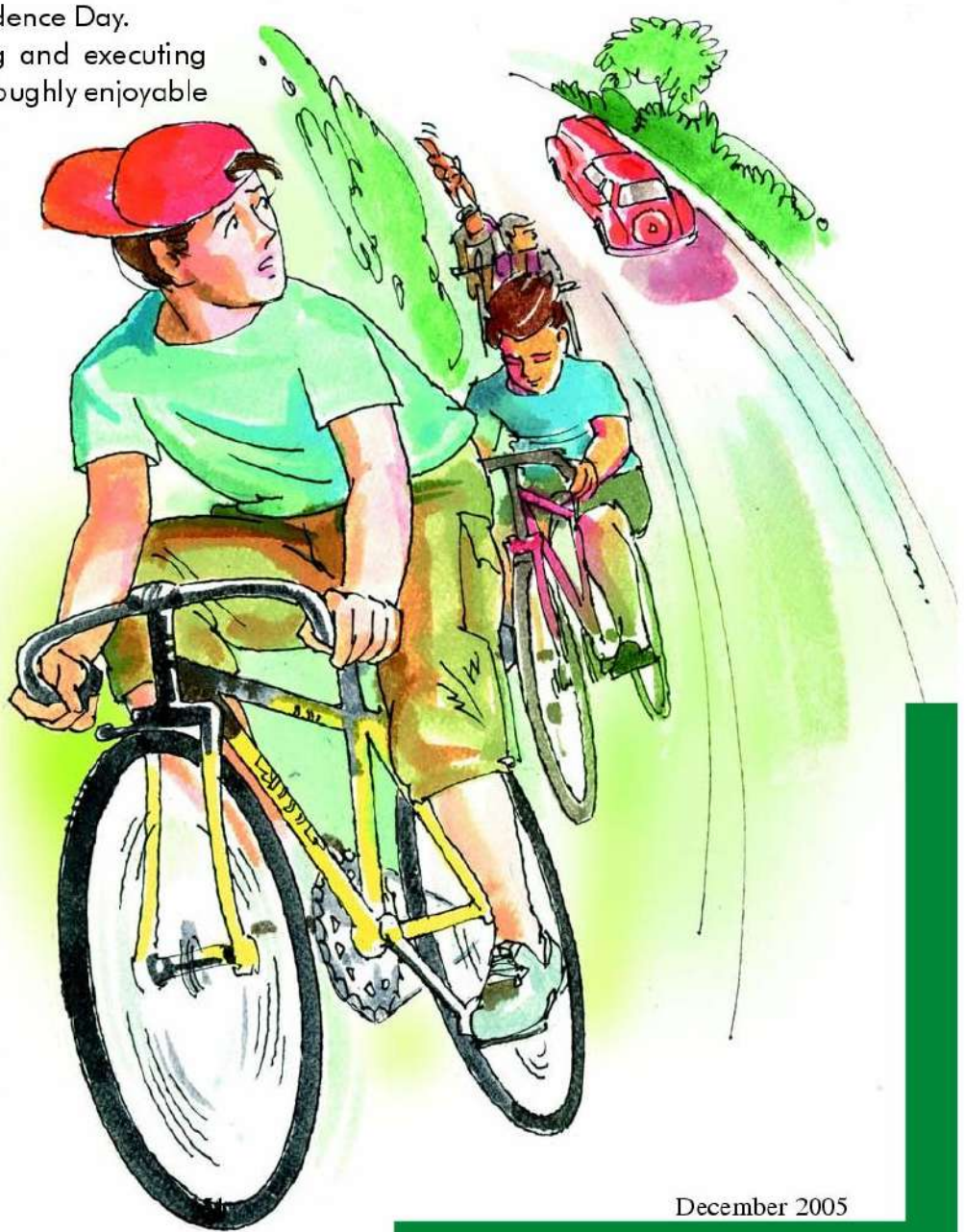
WEEKEND MYSTERIES

It was another fun-filled Saturday, I can say. Another pleasant spring morning was here. I was completely in my own land, thinking and dreaming and also planning about how to make this Saturday better, exciting, and much more enjoyable. First thing that came to my mind was a shopping spree or a bicycle trip to the countryside, now that we had a holiday even on Monday on the eve of Independence Day.

After some more planning and executing them, I was on my way to a thoroughly enjoyable weekend. I was comfortably seated on my bicycle with four or five other bicycles around me on which were mounted my very cooperative friends who, according to my whims and fancies, pestered their adamant parents to agree to their going out.

At our cycle wheels was a Golden Retriever, muscular and giant like. It ran behind with all its might. Tinker never grew tired as far as we knew, but being tired ourselves, we rested for a while sipping on a can of cola each. We sat on the meadow with Tinker running around us attacking each one's cola. Luckily it wasn't ice-cream which he totally adored. We resumed our journey after a few very funny photo sessions.

One thing that puzzled me all through our expedition was the old vintage looking red car that sped past us twice, every time in different directions. As soon as it passed us, Tinker would begin to howl and bark as though trying to warn us 'proceed at your own risk'. But we nonchalanthy pedalled forward. All along the way was a trail of rose and flower petals near uniform tyre trails. Tinker, now sniffing and leading us had a very strange expression suggesting danger. None of us paid any attention to it but carried on without chattering



and laughing when the red car passed us again. This time in the direction we also intended to go.

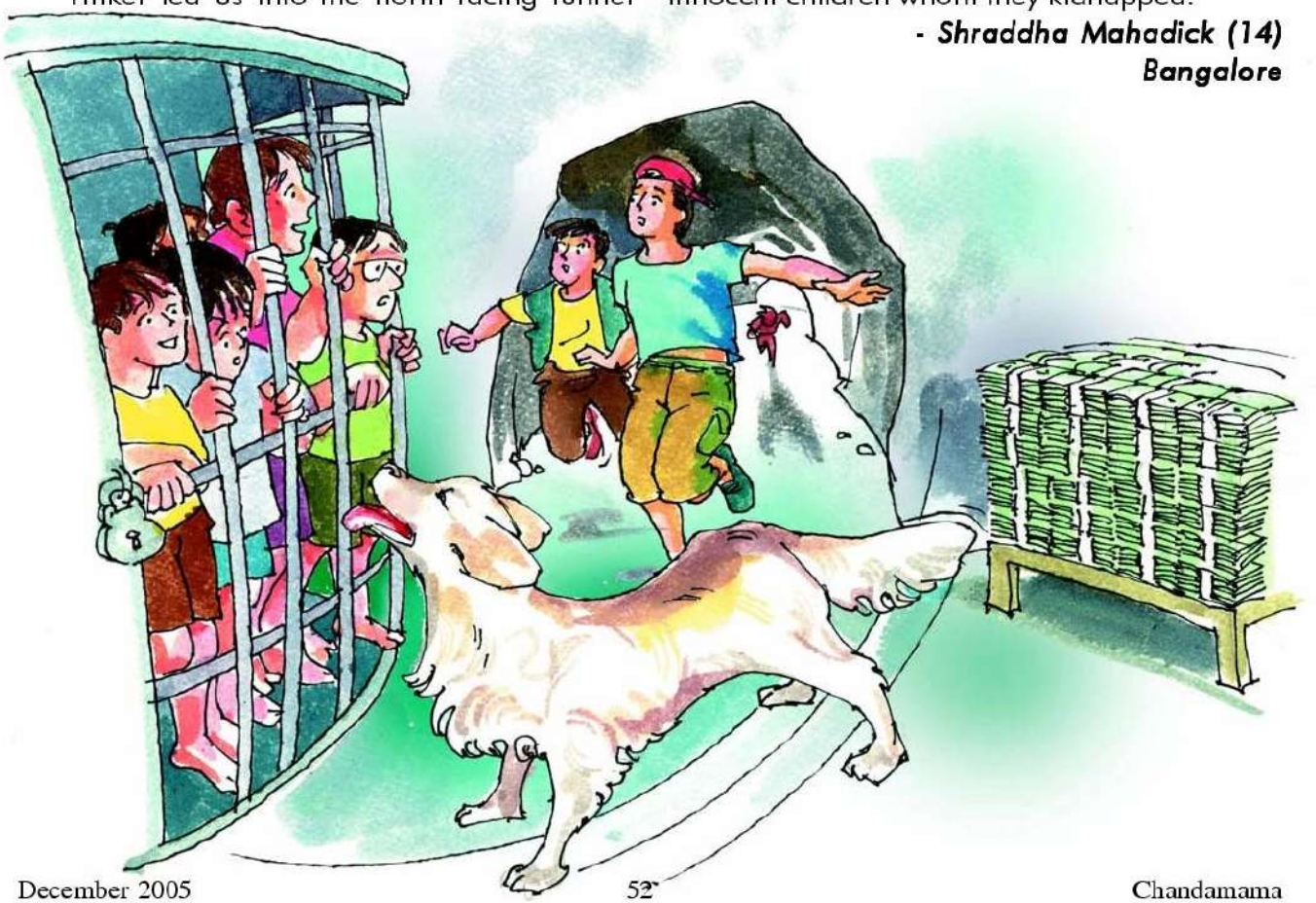
Inside it we hazily saw a boy merely ten years weeping. He wore a rather fearful look but was wailing with terror and scratching someone with anger. As soon as he saw us, he started screaming aloud "Help me! Follow these crooks". Now Tinker was over excited and howled fiercely as though trying to pester us into following the boy's instructions. He sniffed and sniffed until we reached a big boulder which seemed to be an end to this expedition, but Tinker carried on and summoned us to go along. We followed him and at last found ourselves trusting a dog who landed us in a trench into which we slipped as soon as we stepped on a piece of ground. This trench was not quite deep but had tunnels in four directions. Tinker seemed to have no confusion at all, while we looked at each other and the tunnels alternatively.

Tinker led us into the north facing tunnel through which he navigated and took us through many such tunnels and at last leading us into a large room. There were stacked neatly in one corner bundles of currency and at another side was a prison like cell stuffed with 5-6 young children. Some beamed with happiness on seeing us, while some were panic-stricken. On their advice we hurried out of the maze of tunnels and waited at the main boulder. As soon as we reached the boulder, we phoned up the nearest police station saying what we had chanced upon.

Luckily, they trusted us and said they would be there in no time, while the red car was back. We took a careful decision that three of us would stay while the others would follow them. Tinker would wait for the police.

As soon as the police reached the spot we hurried through the maze and startled the kidnappers, who were not only printers of counterfeit notes, but got them distributed through innocent children whom they kidnapped.

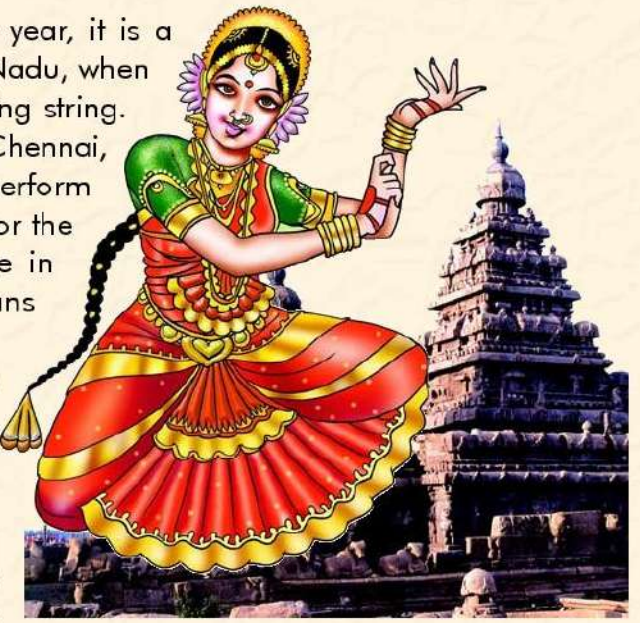
- Shraddha Mahadick (14)
Bangalore



INDIA SCOPE

A SEASON FOR MUSIC AND DANCE

For three months from mid-December every year, it is a veritable feast for the ears and eyes in Tamil Nadu, when music and dance festivals are held like a glittering string. The month-long **Margazhi Festival** takes place in Chennai, when more than 2,000 musicians and dancers perform at nearly 300 concerts. Mid-January is the time for the **Tyagaraja Aradhana** at the saint's birthplace in Tiruvaiyaru, Tanjore, where Carnatic musicians congregate in their hundreds for mass singing.

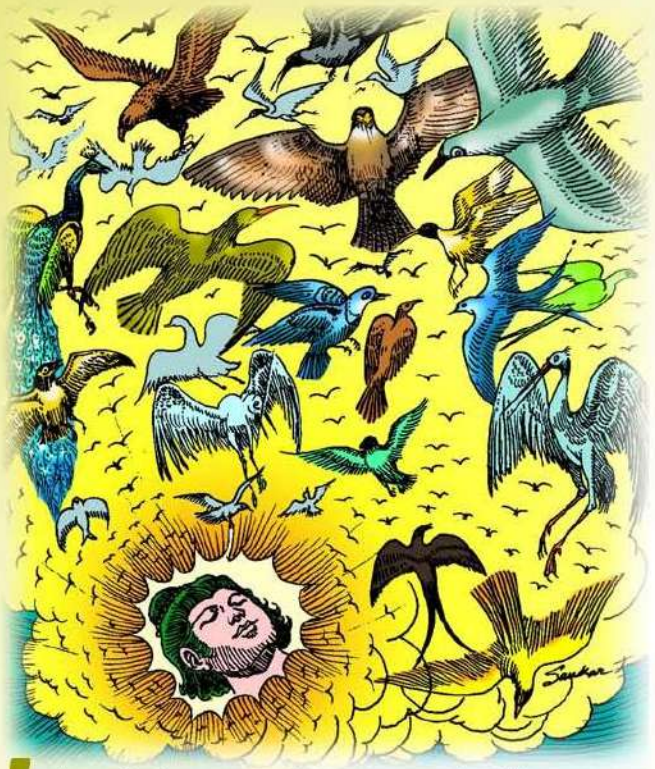


The **Mamallapuram Festival** in Mahabalipuram would have by then started. Exponents of Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Kathak and Kathakali are seen, with the world famous monolith shore temples in the background. The festival lasts till mid-February. It will now be time for the **Natyanjali Festival** in Chidambaram, where the famous temple is dedicated to Lord Siva, the "Cosmic Dancer". The festival, lasting a month from Mahasivaratri and drawing dancers from all over India, is held in the vicinity of the ***sanctum sanctorum.***

STATUES SANS HEADS

Visitors to villages in Vellore district of Tamil Nadu will be surprised to see headless statues in front of Amman (Devi) temples. Their heads, which are separately kept in the temples, are usually replaced at the time of the annual festivals, which are known as Draupadi Amman festivals. It is believed that if the statues appear in full at any other time, the village will experience "fire or flood". The statue is that of Aravaan, believed to be a son of Arjuna, who helped the Pandavas win the Kurukshetra war by sacrificing his life. Hence his appearance without his head. Aravaan, who is supposed to possess as many as 21 special attributes, is also worshipped as a deity.

GLIMPSES OF THE DEVI BHAGAVATAM



Indra called one of his lieutenants and told him, "Go and separate Viswarup's heads from his body."

"Isn't it unfair to mutilate a corpse? It is surprising that you should fear the dead!" remarked the lieutenant.

"Listen to me, friend. I had looked upon Viswarup as my enemy. A king must do everything to eliminate his enemies. I'm afraid of Viswarup because his dead body looked as if there was still life in it. That's why I want you to behead him. Haven't you heard the wise say that one ought to put a complete end to one's enemy, fie, and debt?" explained Indra.

"O King, the one whom you killed was not only innocent, but endowed with a certain spiritual power. Don't you think that you have sinned?" asked the lieutenant.

"Well, I fear my enemy more than my sin! If I have sinned, I can do penance on that count. But where do I go if I am deprived of my kingship?" said Indra.

"O King, you're fond of your position and you're unscrupulous, too. That's why you have been prompted to act improperly. Why should I do a similar thing?" queried the lieutenant.

"Do as I say! You won't have to regret your action. I shall see to it that you're rewarded in some way or the other," said Indra.

The lieutenant was finally influenced. He went and began cutting Viswarup's heads. Something strange happened. From each head that was cut down a thousand birds flew away.

Indra felt happy for a while. But soon a sense of guilt overtook him. How to be free from the consequences of the heinous deed? This was the question that haunted him.

In the meanwhile, the news of Viswarup's death at Indra's hands reached Twastu-Prajapati as the birds tittered about it. Agitated, he challenged the gods to explain their king's conduct.

The gods kept quiet. That provoked him even more. He performed a very special Yajna. Invoked by his spiritual power, out of the holy fire emerged a boy, as radiant as a flame and as strong as thunder.

"My son, I want you to avenge Viswarup's death. Punish the killer, Indra. That alone would justify your emergence."

The boy born of the fire grew up instantly into a valiant youth. He roared out, "O my creator! Your order shall be executed!"

Twastu-Prajapati became happy. He told the youth, "I name you Vritra. I bless you. Become far more powerful than Indra and humble him."

Thereafter Twastu-Prajapati created a number of

24. VICTORY TO VRITRA

weapons for Vritra. At an auspicious moment Vritra went out on his mission, followed by a host of demons.

Soon Indra heard of Vritra's expedition from his messengers. "He looks like a huge mountain, O King, who is out to crush us," said some of the gods.

Ill omens were seen over the palace of Indra. Gigantic vultures and owls, never seen before, flew over the roof and even sat upon it. Distant shouts of the demons echoed against the castle walls. Indra grew nervous. "What's the way out of the present predicament?" he asked Brihaspati, the guru of the Devas.

Brihaspati replied gravely, "Well, Indra, how can you escape the consequences of your misdeed? It is no fun to kill an innocent man. Besides, Viswarup was no ordinary man; he was a savant and a seeker. The law of Karma is bound to operate. Have you ever been in peace since killing Viswarup? You can't dream of peace until you have paid the full price for your impulsive action. Vritra has been despatched by Twastu-Prajapati, who is genuinely aggrieved over Viswarup's death. You've to undergo a period of punishment."

The gods and rishis were found running away from heaven on learning that Vritra was approaching the region. The panicky Indra sent his bodyguards to well known heroes among the gods, like Rudra and Aditya, asking them to get ready for a battle.

Indra requested Brihaspati to accompany him. They sat on the royal elephant and proceded to meet the menace. They were followed by numerous gods. Vritra was advancing riding a Himalayan peak. The two parties confronted each other in a valley to the north of Manasarovar. Instantly the battle began.

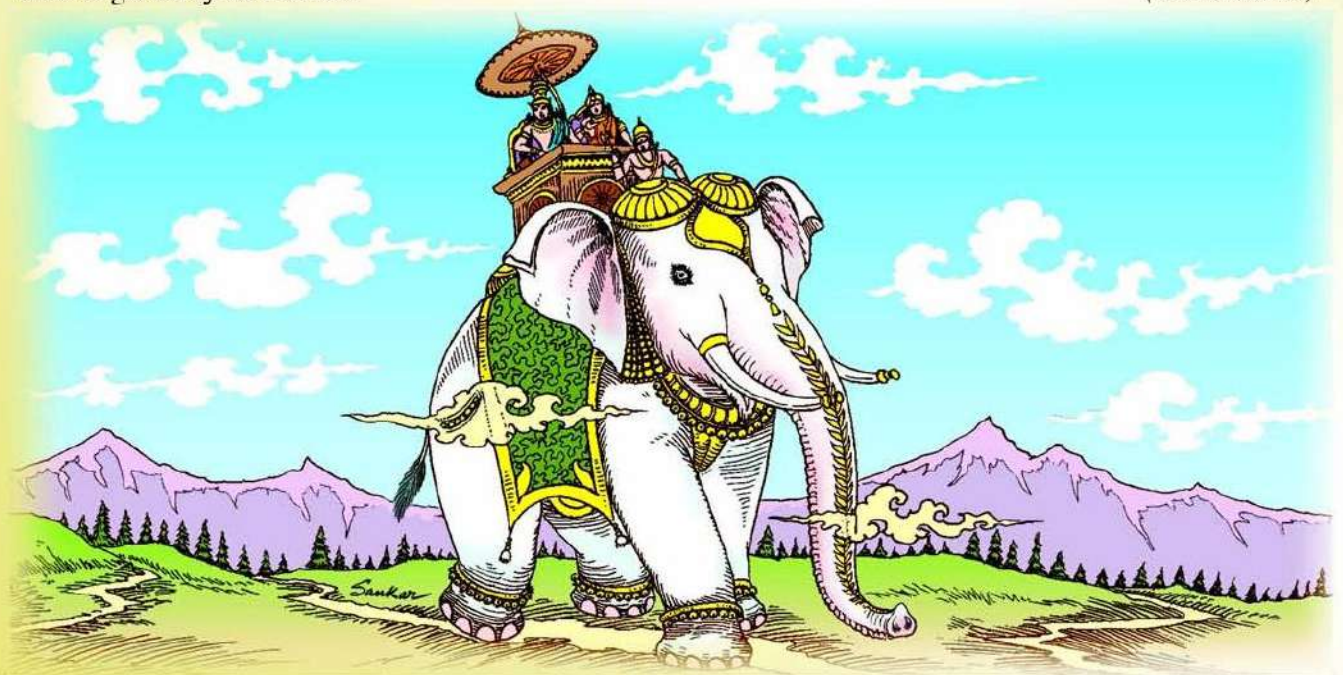
It continued for a hundred years. There was no sign of the gods winning. Some of them, who fought in the forefront, were seen deserting the field. Among them were Varuna, Vayu, Yama and Agni. A panic spread among the gods. Groups of them fled the battlefield. At last Indra, too, did the same, leaving his elephant, Airawata, behind.

Vritra caught hold of the abandoned elephant. That signalled the end of the battle and Vritra's victory.

Vritra went over to Twastu-Prajapati and greeted him and said, "O Father, I took pity on the gods when they ran for their lives. I desisted from harassing them. But here is Indra's elephant, the trophy won by me."

Twastu-Prajapati was happy. He said, "I'm pleased with your valour. Once again I can walk with my head held high. But, my boy, you can't trust Indra. He'll surely look for a chance to kill or imprison you. He will take recourse to every means. I advise you to remain ever alert. Besides, it is necessary that you pray to Brahma and obtain a boon that would make you immortal."

(To continue)



THE CASTLE OF KALEPUR

It was a huge castle, which stood deserted and in a state of great dilapidation, right in the centre of a little village called Kalepur. The village was fringed by woodlands and small hillocks. No one here knew exactly whose castle it was, which period it belonged to, or for how many centuries it had been standing there, for that matter. However, from its present condition, anyone could tell that over many decades, nay, centuries the successive rulers of the land had not made any effort towards its maintenance or renovation. As a result, with the passage of time, the forlorn castle lost all its ancient glory and awesome magnificence–which it must have had in the past when it was abuzz with its denizens–and passed to its present sorry state.

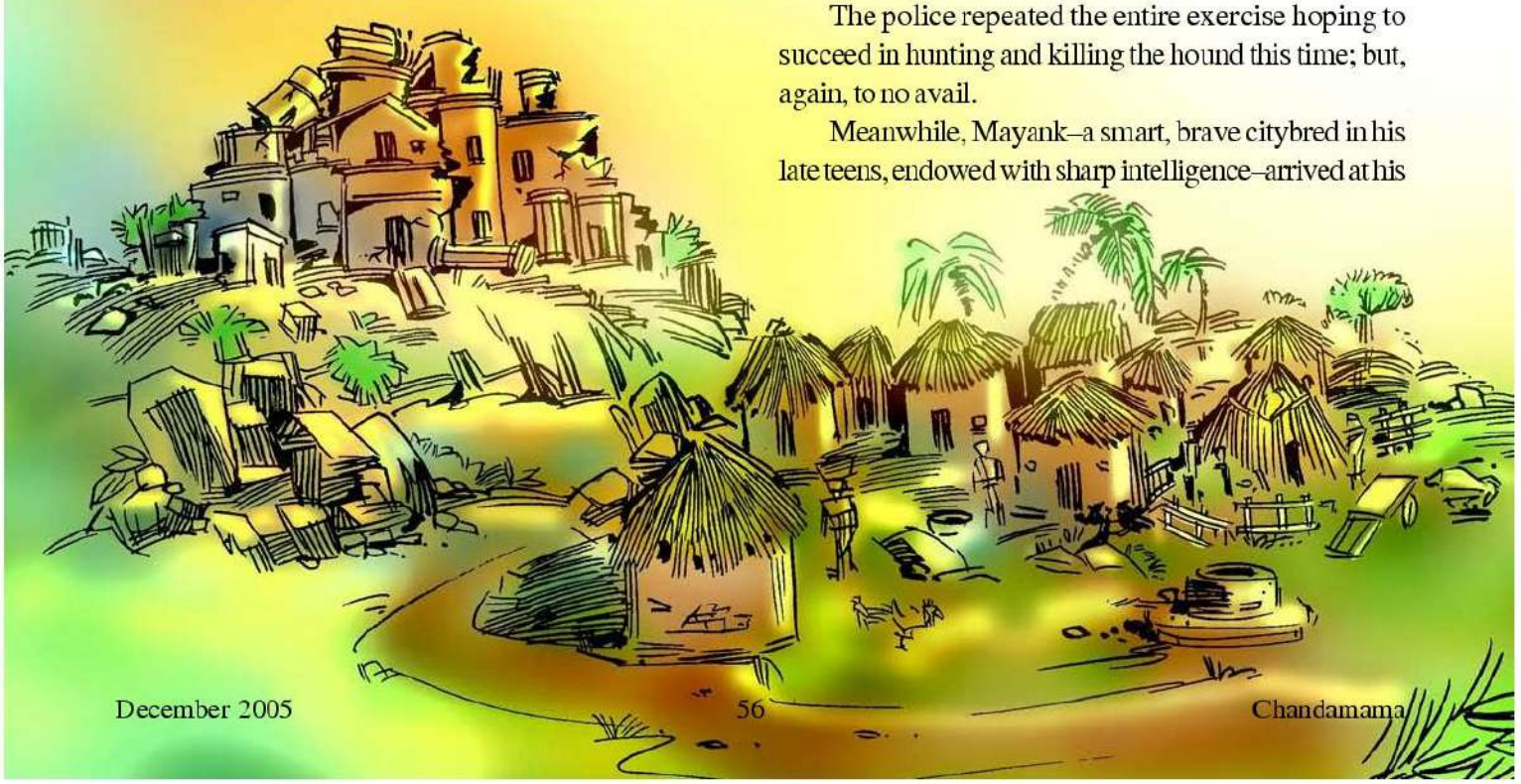
Until only a month ago, this castle had stood in complete silence, as it always had from time immemorial, and things were perfectly normal in the village. Then, suddenly, one night the village heard the howls of a hound, coming from the direction of the castle. The whole village was shocked when a villager–a man in the prime of life–was found lying dead near the castle the next morning. The body bore bruises and deep scratches at several places, apparently caused by some very sharp object. The (local) police and everyone gathered on the scene concluded that the man's death must have been caused by the hound.

The police individually questioned the occupants of half a dozen mud-walled huts that clustered together some hundred yards from the castle, to find out if they had seen any hound. These hut-dwellers belonged to the lowest strata of society and earned their living doing all sorts of menial as well as manual work. They told the police that they had indeed seen a hound near the castle quite recently and even chased it, but it had scurried towards the woodland for cover.

The police subsequently scoured the woodlands taking the assistance of some villagers to hunt for the elusive hound, but to no avail. The village limped back to normal anon, and the howls were not heard for the next few days. Then one night, all of a sudden, the deathly stillness of the village was rent by howling emanating, again, from the direction of the castle. Much to the relief of the village, however, this time nothing untoward was discovered as having happened in the night.

The police repeated the entire exercise hoping to succeed in hunting and killing the hound this time; but, again, to no avail.

Meanwhile, Mayank–a smart, brave citybred in his late teens, endowed with sharp intelligence–arrived at his



grandparents' house in Kalepur, from the city where he lived with his parents and studied in a college. He had come here to spend his summer vacation with his grandparents and fun-loving friends Gurdeep, Mangal, Kishan and Navin.

"It could not be the work of a hound," remarked Mayank, while talking to his friends at his house shortly after his arrival.

"What!?" they all said in a chorus, looking astonished at his remark, as if what he said was something beyond their imagination.

"What makes you think so?" asked Gurdeep.

"You see, it is a well known fact that the woodlands that fringe this village neither are nor have ever been a home to any carnivorous wild animals. Never before has any been reported as living, roaming or finding shelter anywhere here. Both times the hound was seen, as you have all said, by the hut-dwellers only, and none others in the village. Again, when the police searched for it, they found absolutely no trace of it; how could they have found any, anyway, when there exists NO hound in this part of the world?"

"Suppose," he went on, after a pause, "there actually exists one here, then could you believe it could have vanished without trace after killing a man? Don't you all think there is something wrong somewhere, in some way?"

"You mean the hut-dwellers had invented an imaginary hound and told the police they had seen an actual hound?" said Navin.

"Exactly, my friend!" Mayank reacted.

"But why?" inquired Navin.

"Why? How can I tell? But they must have some very strong purpose for doing so," replied Mayank.

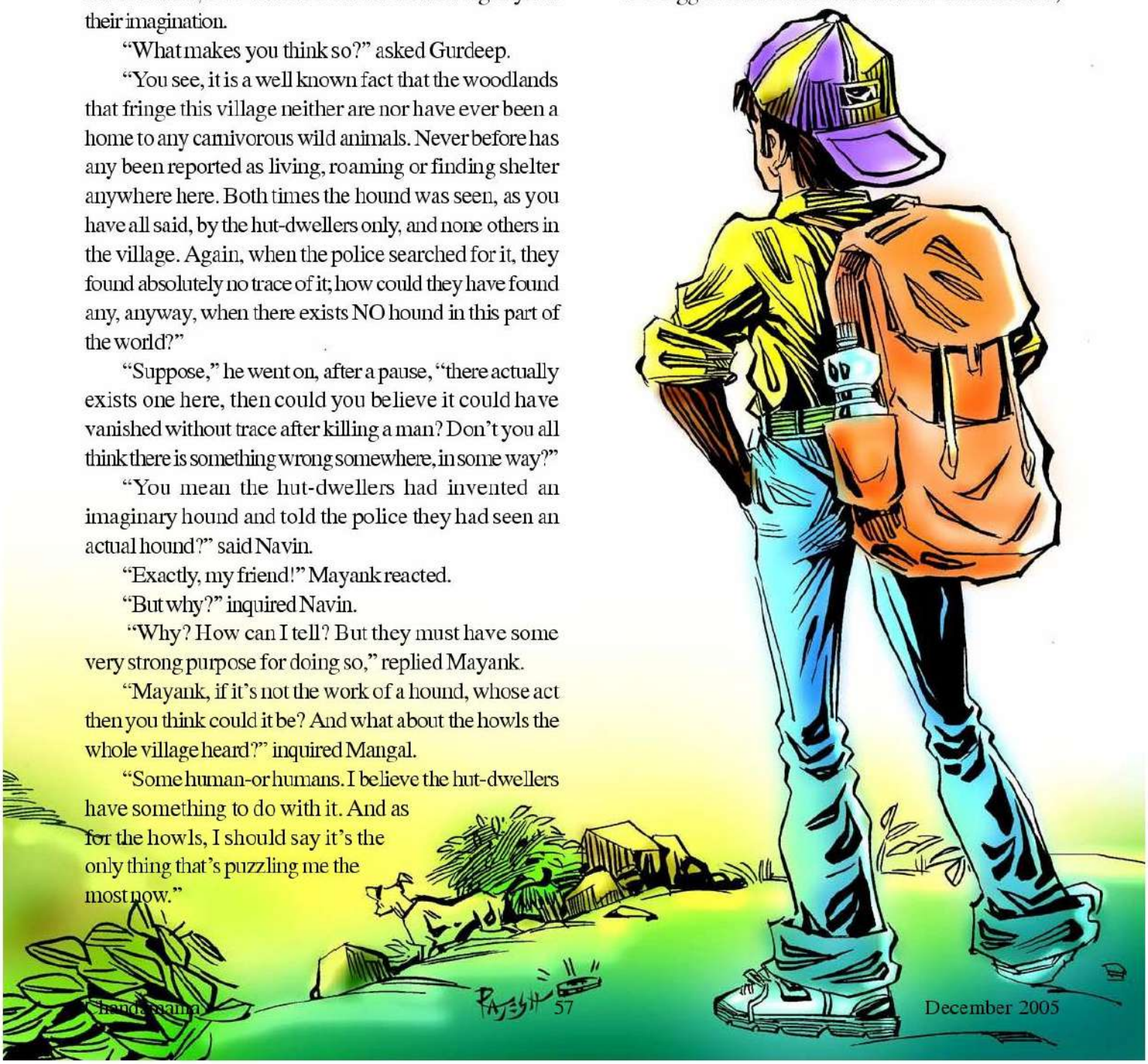
"Mayank, if it's not the work of a hound, whose act then you think could it be? And what about the howls the whole village heard?" inquired Mangal.

"Some human-or humans. I believe the hut-dwellers have something to do with it. And as for the howls, I should say it's the only thing that's puzzling me the most now."

"But if it is indeed the hut-dwellers who did this, then why on earth did they do so?" asked Kishan.

"Maybe they wanted to keep the villagers off the castle area for some reason which only they could tell. The castle holds the key to solving the mystery surrounding the man's death, I think," replied Mayank and, after a pause, proposed, "Why not go there and see for ourselves if we could unravel something that could help throw some light on the mystery?"

His suggestion found favour with the others at once,



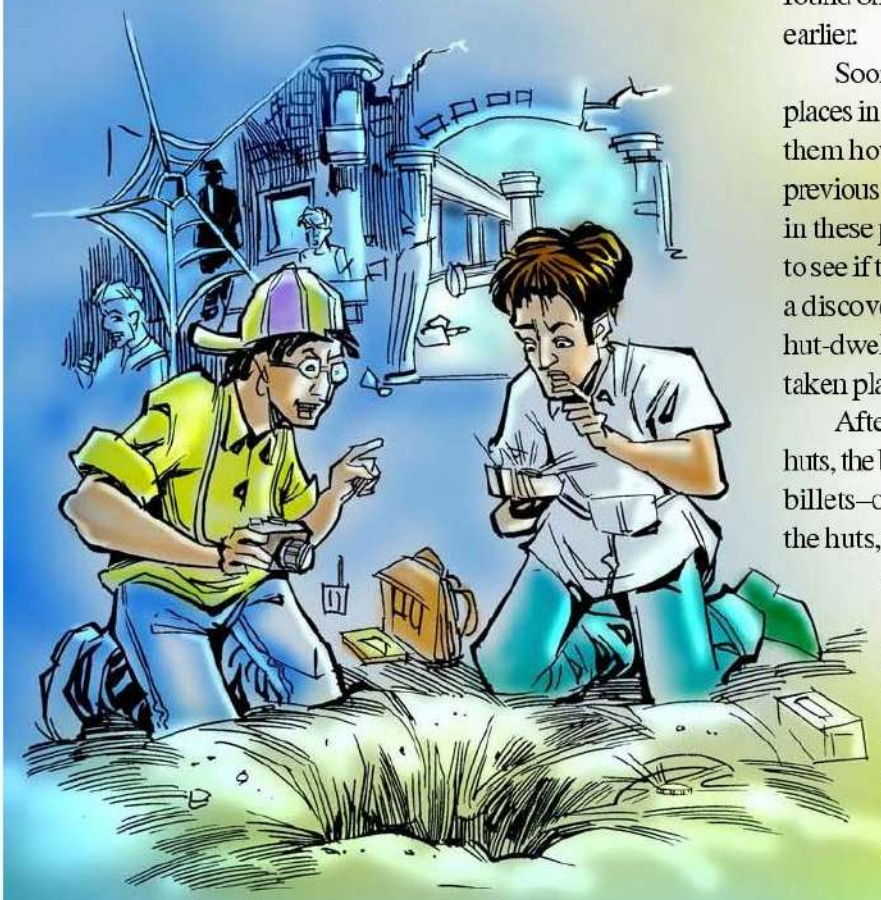
and they all agreed to visit the castle the very next morning.

After breakfast, as agreed, the fivesome set off for the castle. Mayank had taken with him his camera. The path to the castle snaked through a mango orchard beyond which lay many small hillocks, and some hundred yards beyond these hillocks lay the castle. Once the group reached the castle, they got dispersed and began investigating the various places in and around it, looking for anything unusual. However, much to their disappointment, their investigation drew a blank, whereupon they went to the hutments, just to see what's going on there at the time. To their utter astonishment, they found all the huts completely deserted. With absolutely nothing inside, it was clear that their owners had abandoned them and fled the village.

This discovery was a confirmation of Mayank's suspicion–that something was wrong somewhere, in some way.

As lunch time was nearing, the boys headed homeward.

* * * * *



During their investigation of the castle and the huts, Mayank had photographed several places in and around them. While he and his friends were looking at the photographs, Mangal drew the attention of the others to a bright wee little object in one of the photographs, which was a part of the dirt road that ran by the postern gate of the castle and, passing by the hutment, led to Jotpur, a mofussil town some 10 km away from Kalepur.

The object, which looked something like a billet of some metal, generated a great deal of curiosity in the boys, and they all set forth at once for the place to see if the object still lay there and, if so, what it really was.

On arrival there they found it, still lying there, undisturbed. It was indeed a billet. Of gold. Greatly encouraged by their find, the boys began hunting for more billets. Searching, they came to a place inside the castle where the ground appeared to have been dug. The soil there was soft and flaccid. They started digging and turning over the soil with the hope of finding more billets. At first they did not find any; but on digging deeper down, they found one more billet identical to the one they had found earlier.

Soon they discovered that the ground at a few other places in the vicinity had been dug, too. It greatly surprised them how all this had escaped their notice during their previous visit. They, however, did not find any more billets in these places. They then went to the abandoned huts, to see if they could discover some billets there, too. Such a discovery, if made, could establish a link between the hut-dwellers and the digging for the gold billets that had taken place inside the castle.

After a long and thorough search in and around the huts, the boys succeeded in discovering two more identical billets–one inside one of the huts and the other outside the huts, just a short distance away on the dirt road that ran close by the huts and led to Jotpur.

The reasons why the floor inside the castle had been dug and why the hut-dwellers had abandoned their huts, and fled the village were now obvious to the boys: buried, for ages, underground inside the castle lay an ancient treasure of gold billets, which the hut–dwellers had somehow come to know of. They started

hunting for it, and once they had found it, they dug it up and fled the village in order to convert them into money and live in luxury somewhere else for the rest of their lives.

The boys now turned and straightaway went to the police station and informed them about their discovery, so that they could make efforts to run down the hut-dwellers and interrogate them about the treasure–and also about the death of the man and the actual truth behind the sightings by them of a hound.

The police sprang into action and launched a massive hunt to trace the hut-dwellers. Their efforts bore fruit, and within forty-eight hours they were able to round up all the hut-dwellers from Jotpur. A haul of gold billets was recovered from them and they were brought to the station for interrogation.

They confessed that it was actually they, not any hound, who had killed the man who had somehow come to know of the discovery of the treasure by them and was about to inform the police about it.

As regards the howling, they revealed it was only a replay of a high-pitched sound of howling recorded on a tape, which they played in a hi-fi stereo system procured from a music shop in Jotpur and placed on the top of the castle believing that the sound would frighten the villagers so much that they would not dare venture into the castle area, and they (the hut-dwellers) could, in turn, continue their search for the treasure uninterruptedly.

They had spun the story that they had seen an actual hound and chased it, only to mislead the police and the villagers into believing that there indeed existed a hound somewhere in the woodlands and that the man was killed by the very same hound.

They also told the police that their hunt for the buried treasure started one afternoon, when one of them hit on a gold billet lying on the ground at one place inside the castle. Thinking there might lay buried some more gold billets, the villager went back to dig the ground. He dug and dug, only to discover that although he was right in thinking so, he was not quite absolutely right–for he could find just a few billets, and not a whole treasure he had expected to. But this discovery of more billets made him dead sure of one thing: that there lay buried somewhere in the castle a treasure of gold billets. He dug at several places for hours and hours. But he resolved to go back the next day and discover no matter where it lay buried, and dig it up. He knew only too well that once he had laid his hands on the treasure, he could live the rest of his life in luxury in some far away place.

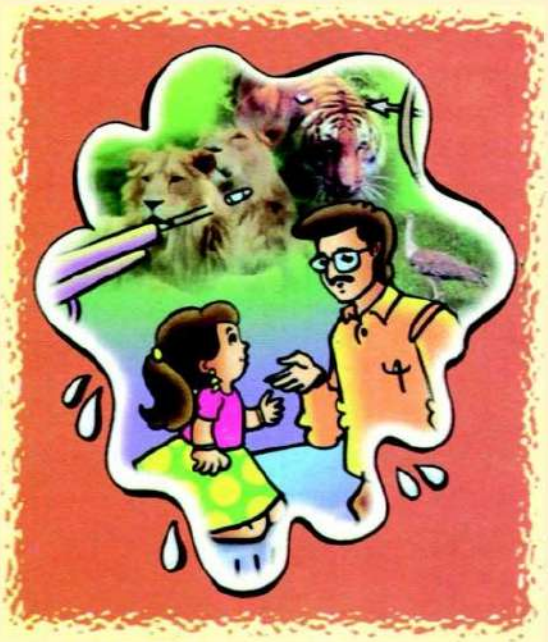
Meanwhile, the other hut-dwellers had come to know about his discovery–thanks to his garrulous wife–and the next day they, too, joined him in a collective hunt for the treasure.

Once they had found the treasure, they dug it up and decamped to Jotpur with their families, the treasure and all. But, to their great misfortune, they were rounded up by the police before they could move to some other place far off.

The police were grateful to Mayank and his friends for the lead they gave that led to solving the mystery of the hound of Kalepur. And for the fivesome, there was a feeling that they had spent a satisfying vacation.

- Sanjay Srivastava

LIVING IN HARMONY



"Daddy, today we learnt about a bird called the Great Indian Bustard," says Veena. "Our teacher told us that it is a very rare bird indeed. It seems only four or five are left in the whole of India!"

"Yes, Veena," says Daddy. "It's a bird that is found only in India and Pakistan. Sadly, indiscriminate poaching has all but wiped it out. Today, not one survives in Pakistan, while in India, just four or five are left – in Rajasthan's Desert National Park."

"Oh! How sad!" exclaims Veena.

"The Bustard's is not an isolated case, Veena," says her father. "The black buck is another animal that is almost extinct, thanks to poachers. As for tigers, India has 60 per cent of the world's tigers. During the 1950s and early 1960s it is recorded that more than 3,000 tigers lost their lives to trophy hunters, most of them being tourists. The population of the Asiatic lion – one of Asia's rarest wild animals – has dwindled to a mere 300, and is confined to the protected Gir sanctuary. The Indian cheetah or hunting leopard – found all over India in the 19th century – has now completely disappeared, after being hunted by the British. Hunting and poaching continue to deplete the wealth of our jungles even today. Even the Tibetan Antelope, living in the icy chill of the highest reaches of Ladakh, is not safe from man's greed – over 20,000 antelopes are slaughtered illegally every year for their fur, which is used for making *shahtoosh* shawls."

"That's terrible! Isn't there anything we can do, Daddy?" asks Veena.

"The most important thing is that you should be aware of what is happening, Veena," replies her father. "Animal products such as tiger skins, ivory products and *shahtoosh* shawls continue to be sold clandestinely, although they are legally banned. You must never encourage poachers by buying these products. Always remember that the earth does not belong to us alone – it is as much the animals' home as it is ours. They, too, have a right to exist!"

Let's paint a better world
Let's save endangered species
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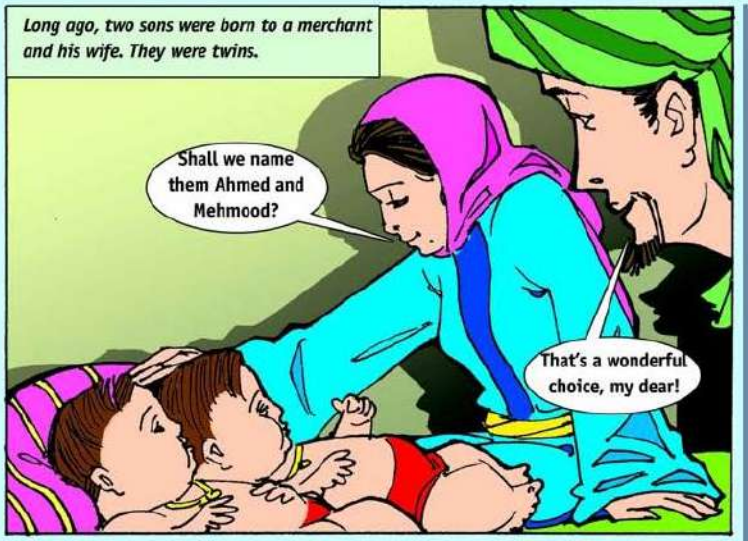
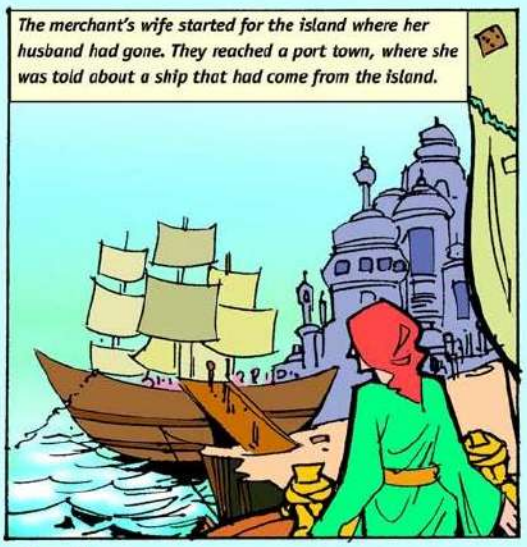
Children : Write a slogan on the subject & get prizes!

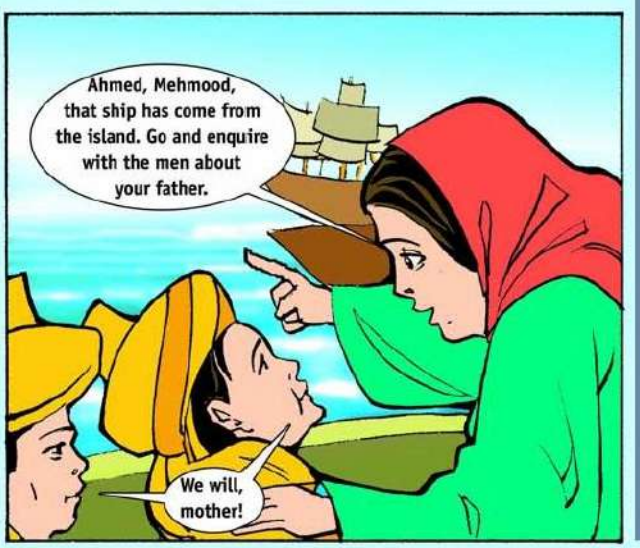
The Arabian Nights

THE MISSING TWINS

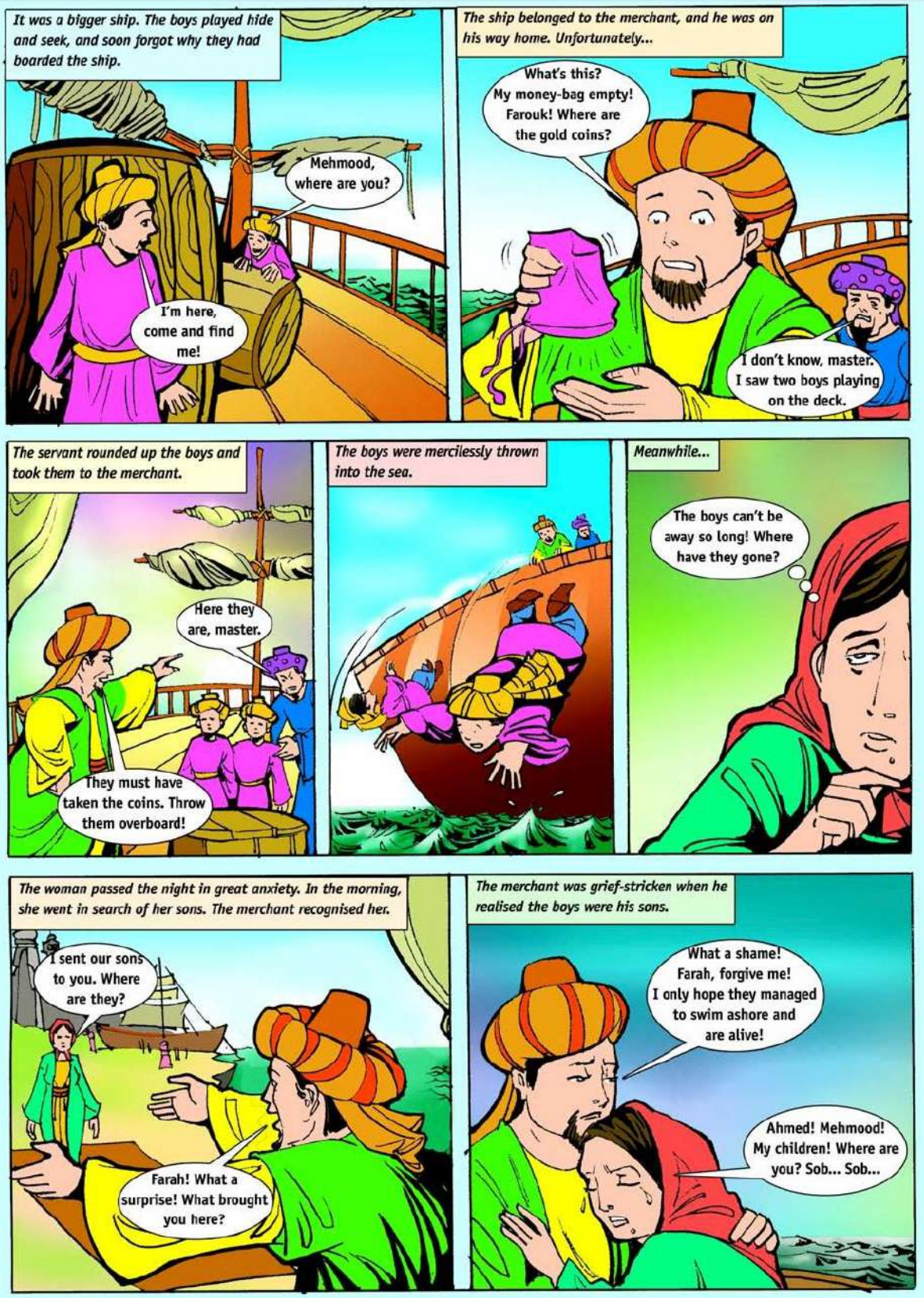

Long ago, two sons were born to a merchant and his wife. They were twins.
Shall we name them Ahmed and Mehmood?
That's a wonderful choice, my dear!

The merchant and the ruler of the island soon became fast friends.
Don't be in a hurry to go back. Stay with me for some more days!
As you wish, your majesty.


The merchant's wife started for the island where her husband had gone. They reached a port town, where she was told about a ship that had come from the island.



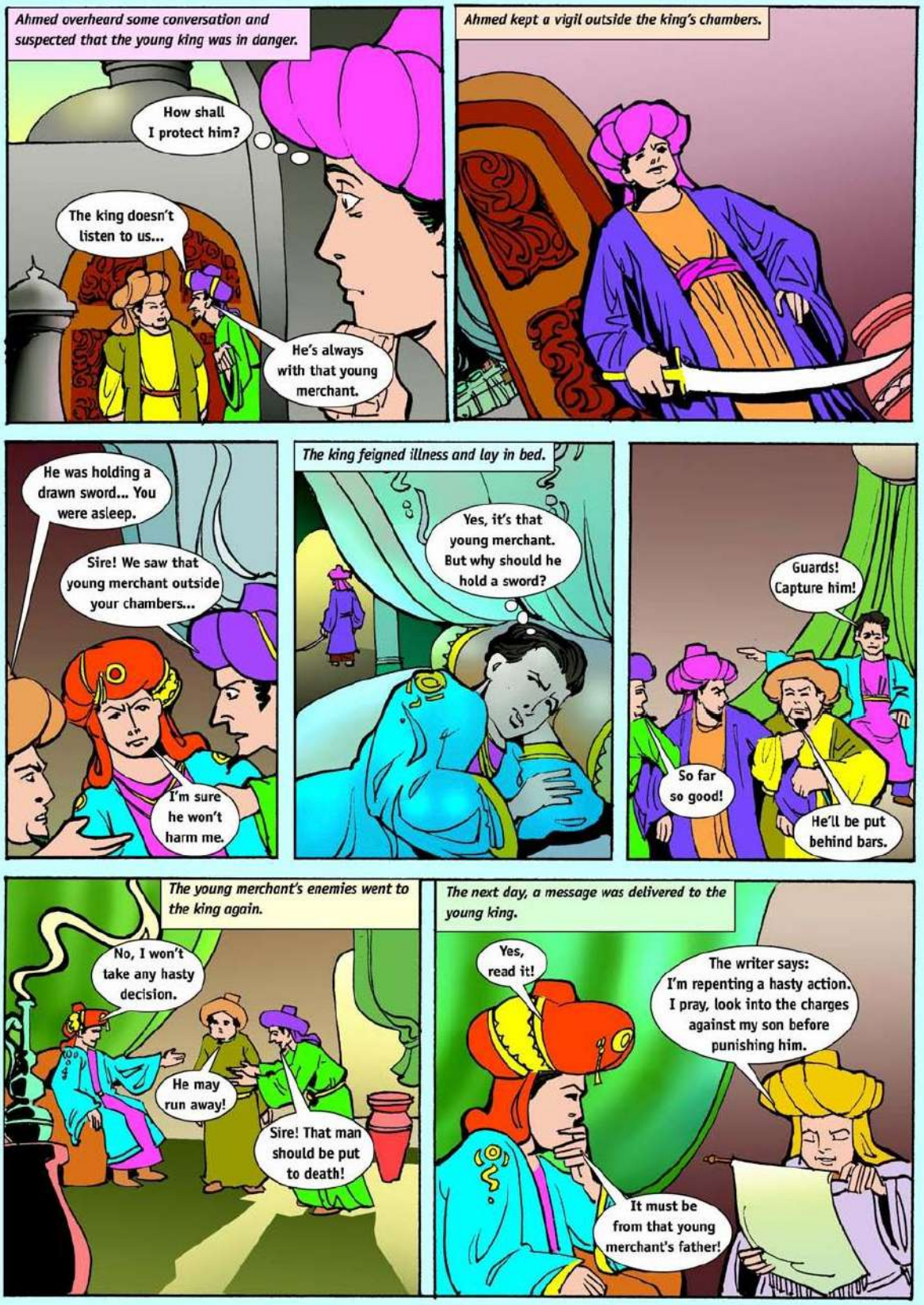
The Arabian Nights


It was a bigger ship. The boys played hide and seek, and soon forgot why they had boarded the ship.
Mehmood, where are you?
I'm here, come and find me!
The ship belonged to the merchant, and he was on his way home. Unfortunately...
What's this? My money-bag empty! Farouk! Where are the gold coins?
I don't know, master. I saw two boys playing on the deck.
The servant rounded up the boys and took them to the merchant.
Here they are, master.
They must have taken the coins. Throw them overboard!
The boys were mercilessly thrown into the sea.
Meanwhile...
The boys can't be away so long! Where have they gone?
The woman passed the night in great anxiety. In the morning, she went in search of her sons. The merchant recognised her.
I sent our sons to you. Where are they?
Farah! What a surprise! What brought you here?
The merchant was grief-stricken when he realised the boys were his sons.
What a shame! Farah, forgive me! I only hope they managed to swim ashore and are alive!
Ahmed! Mehmood! My children! Where are you? Sob... Sob...

THE MISSING TWINS

The merchant and wife went back home. They spent their days in prayers.
Allah be praised!
May Allah protect our children!
When there were no signs of their sons, the merchant brought home a boy he picked up from the slave market.
Farah! We'll adopt him as our son.
It's Ahmed, our son! Where's your brother?
We were thrown into the sea and we drifted apart. I was rescued by a boat. The boatman sold me in the slave-market. I didn't see Mehmood again.
The merchant re-started his business and prospered. He set sail for the island again. Ahmed, now grown up, accompanied him.
The island now had a young ruler. Ahmed was introduced to him.
Young man, let your father continue his sailing, you stay with me for some days.
As you wish, my lord.
The king and young Ahmed spent much time together.
My lord, I feel some people in the palace don't like our friendship.
I, too, had my suspicion. We shall be careful.
One day, the young king took ill, and he was bed-ridden. Fearing that some harm might come to him, the merchant's son stood guard outside the king's chamber.

The Arabian Nights


Ahmed overheard some conversation and suspected that the young king was in danger.
How shall I protect him?
The king doesn't listen to us...
He's always with that young merchant.
Ahmed kept a vigil outside the king's chambers.
He was holding a drawn sword... You were asleep.
Sire! We saw that young merchant outside your chambers...
I'm sure he won't harm me.
The king feigned illness and lay in bed.
Yes, it's that young merchant. But why should he hold a sword?
Guards! Capture him!
So far so good!
He'll be put behind bars.
The young merchant's enemies went to the king again.
No, I won't take any hasty decision.
He may run away!
Sire! That man should be put to death!
The next day, a message was delivered to the young king.
Yes, read it!
The writer says: I'm repenting a hasty action. I pray, look into the charges against my son before punishing him.
It must be from that young merchant's father!

THE MISSING TWINS

The contents of the message had great similarity with the king's own thoughts.
I might have repented if I had ordered his execution! He could be innocent. I must send for the merchant.
Without realising who they were, I had thrown my twins overboard.
Sir, what was the action that made you repent later?
Twins? Thrown into the sea? Could I meet their mother?
The merchant's wife was sent for. The young king fell into the lady's arms.
Mother! I'm Mehmood!
Mehmood, my child! And you're king here?
When I fell into the sea, I began swimming and I reached the island.
I was taken to the ageing childless king and he adopted me as his son. Eventually I succeeded him.
King Mehmood called his guards and asked them to bring Ahmed from the prison.
I can see my father, mother and the king.
Ahmed! My twin brother!
The merchant and his wife were very happy that they had found their missing sons.
May Allah be praised!
I think we can now forget the miserable life that we led without our sons.
The End

Photo Caption CONTEST

NARAYANAMURTHY TATA

Can you write a caption in a few words, to suit these pictures related to each other?

You may write it on a post card marking it:

Photo Caption Contest, CHANDAMAMA

and mail it to reach us before the 20th of the current month.

NARAYANAMURTHY TATA

WINNING ENTRY

"Dare Devil"
"Little Devil"

Congratulations!

October 2005 Lucky Winner:

J. HEPSIBA
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Vidyut Nagar
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